



3 1761 06891723 6

4 Vols #1, 75

P/L

~~W. H. Oliver~~

~~Aug 10 1845~~



Presented to the
LIBRARY of the
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
by

Mr. Aubrey Gray

N J. N. Vane

~~Isabella Morgan
To Grace Howe
June 7th 1799~~



A
P A R A P H R A S E
A N D
C O M M E N T

U P O N T H E
Epistles *and* Gospels,

Appointed to be Used in the
Church of *ENGLAND*

O N A L L
S U N D A Y S and H O L Y - D A Y S
Throughout the Year.

Designed to Excite Devotion, and
to promote the Knowledge and Practice
of Sincere Piety and Virtue.

V O L. I.

By GEORGE STANHOPE, D. D.
Dean of *Canterbury*, and Chaplain in
Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

The fifth Edition.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. and J. KNAPTON; A. BETTESWORTH and C.
HITCH; J. HAZARD; E. PARKER; R. WILLIAMSON; S.
BIRT; B. MOTTE; S. HARDING, and T. OSBORNE. 1732.



BS

2547

S7

1732

v.1

TO THE
K I N G ' S

M O S T E X C E L L E N T
M A J E S T Y.

S I R,

T *HIS Work had Ten Years
ago the Honour of ma-
king its first Appearance
in the World under the Patron-
age of Your M A J E S T Y ' S most
A 2 Pious*

DEDICATION.

Pious Royal Predecessor. I did then think it my Duty to excite in all its Readers, a thankful and just Regard, for the very highly valuable Blessing of a Protestant Succession to these Kingdoms, established in Your MAJESTY'S most Illustrious House. I do now, with the same Thankfulness, adore that Wisdom and Goodness of the Divine Providence, which hath placed Your MAJESTY on the Throne, with all the Demonstrations of a General Joy, and United Affections, that any Whole People are capable of giving to any Successor.

*If among These I also presume to welcome Your MAJESTY
with*

DEDICATION.

with the humble Offering of a Book, composed at first, and now again published, for the Advancement of Virtue and Religion in general, and for the sake of doing Justice to the Offices of that particular Church, which now reveres Your MAJESTY, as its supreme Governour and mighty Defender: Your Princely Goodness will not I hope disdain to countenance this poor, but unfeigned Testimony, of my Zeal, for the Honour and Service of God, of the Church, and of Your MAJESTY. A Zeal, which will constantly exert it self in earnest Prayers for Your Long Life and Peaceful Reign; for the Stability of Your Throne in Your Royal Descendants; and
for

DEDICATION.

for All, that can make You Glorious and Happy, in This World, and in a Better.

I am

May it please Your MAJESTY,

with the profoundest Duty

and Deference,

Your MAJESTY's most Devoted,

most Faithful, and

most Obedient Humble

Servant and Chaplain,

September
22, 1714.

George Stanhope.

TO THE
QUEEN's
MOST
Excellent Majesty.

May it please Your Sacred Majesty,

THAT This Undertaking presumes to beg Your MAJESTY's Gracious Acceptance, and the Patronage of Your Royal Name, is not from any Confidence the Author entertains, of the Perfection of the Work ; but purely from a Sense of Your MAJESTY's ready Inclination to countenance and promote every Good Design.

For, MADAM, the Ends intended to be served by the following Treatise, are, Instructing Your People in the Principles, and exciting them to the Practice,
of

EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

of true Religion: Assisting them with Proper Meditations, at the Solemn Seasons of approaching God in his Publick Worship: Employing their Thoughts upon Passages of Scripture, which prove and explain our common Christianity, and dispose to Piety, and Virtue, and Peace: And particularly, making them duly sensible, how wise and profitable a Choice, for these Purposes, Our Excellent Liturgy hath made, in the Yearly Course of Epistles and Gospels. And, to admit any manner of Doubt, whether such Designs as These, shall obtain Your MAJESTY'S Protection and Favour, were great Ingratitude, greatly Injurious, to the Piety and Goodness of such a QUEEN.

All We, who have the Honour of Waiting at the Altar, do justly esteem it our unspeakable Happiness, that our holy Exhortations from the Pulpit, and the Press, are so powerfully recommended by a Royal Example. For, What greater Satisfaction hath any Good Man

EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

Man to wish, in this World, than to see the pure Doctrine of the best of Churches exemplified and adorned by the best of Princes? 'Tis thus Your MAJESTY proves beyond all Contradiction, that Zeal and Affection for our Establishment, which You have been pleased so often, and so solemnly, to declare, to the Comfort and Joy of all that love our *Sion*. 'Tis thus Your Practice deservedly reproaches the too many, who are liberal in their Professions of Loving Her, but neglect to give the like Evidence of their Sincerity. 'Tis thus that you (it ought to be presumed) will influence Them to better Consideration, who, did they rightly understand, could not forbear to love Her.

This Glory (we hope) is reserved for Your MAJESTY's Reign; to triumph over Tyranny and Oppression abroad; and, (which is yet a nobler Victory) over Vice and Division at Home.

Of so vast Importance to This Church and Nation, to the Prosperity of *Europe*, and to the Advancement of Vir-

EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

tue and Religion, is that most precious Life; Which, that Almighty God in his Mercy would prolong, and sweeten with Health, and all possible Blessings, upon Your MAJESTY'S Person, and Your Royal Confort: That the Happiness of You Both may be as eminently Great, as Your mutual Affection, and Princely Qualities, are Conspicuous and Exemplary, is the constant and earnest Prayer of,

May it please Your Majesty,

Your Majesty's most Devoted,

most Obedient,

and most Humble Servant,

George Stanhope.

T H E

P R E F A C E.

I Think my self obliged to premise somewhat very briefly, as well concerning the Subject treated of in the following Work, as concerning the Nature and Design of the Work it self: That so my Reader, before his Entrance upon the Book, may understand what he is to expect, and what Improvement, the Author hopes, may result from it.

The Subject treated of consists of those Collects, Epistles, and Gospels, which make a part of Divine Worship upon all solemn Days: in that, commonly called the Communion Service. A Service still in use, for the keeping up, or for instructing our People in the Reasons of, a more than ordinary regard to the Times thus distinguished. For, although the Sacra-

ment of the Lord's Supper be not, cannot be now conveniently, (which yet it is much to be wish'd it could be, and were) administered so often in all our Congregations: That Omission ought not, however, to hinder the retaining so much of the Service, as the present Condition of Things allows. Especially, when this part is so particularly edifying, that it could very ill be spared in any such Assemblies; And that the Instituting of our Festivals and Fasts must needs signify very little without it.

*The Collects, First, seem to be so called, Either because some very material Passages of the Epistle, or Gospel, or Both, are here drawn so together, as either to lay the Foundation, or to make the Matter, of the Petitions more especially proper for the Day: Or else, because several Requests are here compacted close into one short Form. And with These I am no further concerned, than by Marginal References, to point out the Scriptures, whence they are taken. Some of which relate to the Things we ask: Others express the Ground upon which we ask, or
the*

the Occasion of asking them at that time: All of them agree, in justifying these Prayers, in exposing the Weakness of those who suffer themselves to be deluded, and the Disingenuity of those who go about to deceive the Vulgar, into a Dislike of our Liturgy. And this, upon a frivolous Pretence of these Forms being taken out of the Romish Mass Book. Whereas the being found there neither is to Us, nor was any Inducement at all to our wise and pious Reformers heretofore. But they considered, that we ought to depart from the Corruptions only of that Church; And when these were entirely Corrected, or cast off, they rightly judged, that it would have then argued a strange, and even scandalous, Perverseness, not to retain those Parts or Offices, the Soundness whereof was evident, by their being either expressly contained in, or undeniably founded upon, the Word of God himself.

The Epistles, (for so the Whole Collection of them is commonly called, taking its Denomination from the far greater
Part,)

Part,) are Portions of Scripture, chiefly consisting of Moral Precepts. Some few indeed must be excepted; which are, either Passages Prophetical of our Blessed Saviour, with regard to his First or Second Coming; Or else Historical, relating the memorable Acts of the Saints, whom the Church commemorates; Or Doctrinal, illustrating the Ends, and Advantages, of our Lord's Actions or Sufferings. Amongst those Epistles (strictly so called) some have a more immediate regard to Questions of great Importance, between the Jews and Christians, at the time when they were written. Yet are they not so confined to the Controversies then depending; but that they, at the same time, help to explain many essential Points and Privileges of our Religion; Such as are highly necessary to be understood, and capable of bringing Improvement to Ours, and to all Ages of the Church.

In treating of These, I have made it my Endeavour to set forth, First, their most Literal Sense, in Agreement with the
Occa-

Occasion, which the Writers seem to have had next in View. And afterwards, to deduce from thence such Applications, as may render them of general Benefit, and shew Us Our Concern in them. And, for the rest, it has been my Care to enforce the Duties contained in them, with Arguments so suited to the Subject; That every Member of our Church may easily be convinced, how greatly those among us are to blame, who lead vitious Lives: Especially, how false the Pretence of Ignorance to do better, must needs be, when this short Collection alone presents them with so plain a Summary, so complete a Body, of Practical Religion.

In the Gospels we are furnished with the strongest Evidences of our Faith. The Mysteries of our Lord's Incarnation and Nativity, The Miracles he wrought, The Parables he spoke, The holy Exhortations he has left us, whether in Publick Discourses to the Multitudes, or in Private Conferences with his own Disciples; The History of his Life and Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven; The

Promises of his Holy Spirit, and Predictions of the many wonderful Things, which his Followers, thus assisted, should be enabled to perform, in Confirmation of the Truth: These, upon the matter, make up the Substance of this part of our Service. Which gives us a perfect System for the Establishment of our Faith, as the Epistles have been observed to do, for the Direction of our Manners.

It were therefore heartily to be wished, that the Excellency and Usefulness of those Scriptures, chosen for the Instruction and Edification of our People, were more generally laid to Heart: That Men were duly sensible of the Happiness of that Communion, in which such effectual Care is taken for their Souls; that All, who frequent our Publick Assemblies, are secure of being taught, even there, the whole of That, which is necessary to their Salvation. And I hope, I may take leave to recommend this (as I conceive) very reasonable Instance of Modesty and Prudence, that such Deference may be paid to the Authority and Wisdom of our Governors;
as

as for our Flocks to make those Passages of Scripture, the Subject of their Private Study and Meditation, which have been judged most proper for their Publick Instruction. For, although our Church do, as indeed She ought, indulge the free Use of the whole Book of God to all Her Children; and as liberally impart unto them, in the Course of daily Lessons throughout the Year: Yet, since these Passages are singled out, for such Times, as are supposed to draw the greatest numbers together; This, methinks, is a fair Intimation, and fit to be taken by the generality of People, that such Portions of the Bible are not only of singular Profit, when rightly understood; but that they are likewise best suited to the Capacities of Common Men; and consequently, if attended to with Diligence and Honesty, in less Danger of being misunderstood.

It is in order to render these publick Provisions more effectual, and to assist Men in the more essential and useful Parts of Religion, that the following Treatise hath been composed and published. A Work,
indeed

indeed originally intended, for the more particular Service of an Excellent Young Prince. The prudent Methods of whose Education, tho' they were far from needing any Helps from so much meaner Hands; Yet did not make the Zeal of offering them, cease to be a Tribute due to his high Station, from every Lover of this Church and Country. God saw him quickly ripe for Heaven, and bath actually plac'd upon his Head a brighter and more durable Crown, than That, which awaited him in Reversion here below. To His infinite Advantage, 'tis certain; though to the sad Disappointment of those glorious Prospects, which fed our Hopes of his Future Greatness, and our Happiness in it. For, What indeed might we not be allowed to promise our selves, of Wisdom, and Virtue, and Goodness, and every Qualification, proper to a Princely, and a Christian Mind; from a Genius so noble, a Capacity so large, Attainments so far above His tender Age, and, to say all in a Word, from the Son of such Parents?

But God is wise and just in all his Counsels. And, blessed be his Mercy, which hath preserved to us a Royal Mother: To the Number of whose Years, we hope, he will please to add the Proportion, wanting in the natural Course of her Son's. Nor must we forget to be truly thankful for the very valuable Blessing, of a Protestant Succession to our Posterity; when those Years shall, as alas! at length they must, fail. So that our Excellent Church hath still all the Security, that Human Appearances can give, of a firm and lasting Establishment. The only Dangers, that seem to threaten us, arise from our Wickedness, and our Divisions. The Former would be effectually prevented, by improving those Advantages to Devotion, and Piety, and all manner of Virtue, which (it is the Design of this Treatise to shew) are, in great plenty, put into our Hands. The Latter would be in good measure healed, would our Brethren of different Persuasions lay aside their unreasonable Prejudices so far, as to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the true Christian Spirit,
the

the Wisdom, the Usefulness, the Seasonableness, of our Publick Offices. To both which ends, so far as my present Concern reaches, somewhat, I am apt to believe, the following Discourses may contribute; if they shall be allowed so much place, in the more retired Devotions of the Family, or the Closet; that each of them be made the Subject of Private Consideration, on the respective Days of their being publickly read in our Churches. This Method would always employ our Thoughts with Safety, and Edification; and, upon all solemn Occasions, will suggest such things to our Minds, as are sure to be seasonable and proper, and leave good Impressions behind them.

In pursuance of my Design to render this Book useful to All, I have endeavoured, that it may not be (justly) unacceptable to Any. Hence all the Modern Points of Controversy are no where industriously enlarged upon. And, as oft as the Vindication of the Church's Honour hath made some little mention of any such necessary; it hath been my constant Desire to avoid
all

all Offence, by treating Those of a different Opinion, in such a manner, as to intend the refuting their Errors, but never the reproaching any Persons, who lie under the Unhappiness of being seduced into them.

When I first undertook this Work, it was in my Mind, to have explained particularly the Reasons, and Usages, of the several solemn Seasons, set apart for Publick Devotion; As also, to have given some short Account, of the Remains we have in History, concerning those Blessed Saints, whose Virtues we at set times commemorate, and of the Reasonableness of paying this Honour to them. But, being in this Subject already prevented, by the pious Labours of a Learned and Worthy Friend; I shall contract my Thoughts of this kind, as Occasions offer, and only hint so much, as may be serviceable to the main Design of this Book: Which is, the expounding and improving the Portions of Scripture, recommended to us on those occasions.

Mr. Nelson
on the Fes-
tivals and
Fasts.

I have done, after having advised my Reader, not to look for any Ostentation of
A *Nicety,*

Nicety, or Eloquence, in the following Sheets; but such a plain and familiar Style, as might make my Arguments most intelligible, and my Exhortations, grounded upon them, most affectionate and moving. For the things I aim at, are, Becoming an Instrument of Good in the Function God hath called me to; Doing Justice to the purest and wisest of Churches; And, as She in appointing, so I, in discoursing upon her Epistles and Gospels, Seek the Profit of many, that they may be saved. With this Mind, if the Reader do likewise take care to peruse them, my End will not fail in good degree to be attained, nor the Blessing of God to reward his Pains. To whose Grace I most heartily recommend these poor unworthy Labours, and every One, into whose Hands they shall come: Beseeching Him, to be present with all such; and, by the inward Teachings of his Holy Spirit, to prosper whatsoever is contained, and to supply whatsoever is wanting, here. That Peace and Love, Decency and Order, Union and Obedience, Truth and Justice, Religion and Piety may flourish and abound

bound more and more, to the Advancement of his Glory, the Good of his Church, the Safety, Honour, and Welfare of Our Sovereign and Her Kingdoms: And especially, that the Practice of those Virtues, and the Promotion of such Happiness on Earth, may bring many Souls to that Happiness in Heaven, of which there shall be no End. Amen.

T H E
C O N T E N T S
O F T H E
F I R S T V O L U M E.

| | Page |
|---|--------------|
| F <i>First Sunday in Advent.</i> | Epistle. 1 |
| | Gospel. 28 |
| <i>Second Sunday in Advent.</i> | Epistle. 46 |
| | Gospel. 64 |
| <i>Third Sunday in Advent.</i> | Epistle. 78 |
| | Gospel. 99 |
| <i>Fourth Sunday in Advent.</i> | Epistle. 112 |
| | Gospel. 123 |
| <i>Christmas Day.</i> | Epistle. 146 |
| | Gospel. 165 |
| <i>St. Stephen's Day.</i> | Epistle. 199 |
| | Gospel. 222 |
| <i>St. John's Day.</i> | Epistle. 242 |
| | Gospel. 262 |
| <i>Innocents Day.</i> | Epistle. 282 |
| | Gospel. 298 |
| <i>Sunday after Christmas.</i> | Epistle. 314 |
| | Gospel. 334 |
| <i>Circumcision of Christ.</i> | Epistle. 350 |
| | Gospel. 366 |
| <i>Epiphany.</i> | Epistle. 382 |
| | Gospel. 399. |

A
PARAPHRASE and COMMENT

Upon all the

Epistles and Gospels,
Used throughout the Year.

VOL. I.

The First Sunday in Advent.

The COLLECT.

Almighty God, give us Grace, that we may cast
* away the Works of Darknes, and put upon us
the Armour of Light, now in the time of this
mortal Life, (in which thy Son Jesus Christ came
to visit us † in great Humility) that in the last
Day, when he shall come again in his † glorious
Majesty, to judge * both the quick and dead, we may † rise to
the Life immortal, through Him, who liveth and reigneth
with Thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. *Amen.*

* *Rom. xiii. 12.*
† *Phil. ii. 7.*
Matt. xxi. 5.
† *Luke xxi. 27.*
* *2 Tim. iv. 1.*
† *1 Thes. iv. 16, 17.*
John v. 29.

The EPISTLE.

Rom. xiii. 8.

8. **O**WE no Man any thing but to love one another;
for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the
Law.

any Relation, Natural or Civil, requires at your Hands. But know, there is still
one Duty of universal and perpetual Obligation. For Charity, even when it hath
done most, is ever bound, and ever labouring, to do more: And this is so compre-
hensive, that it does not only take in the Letter, but answers the Intent, of the
whole Moral Law.

9. For this, Thou shalt not commit Adultery, Thou shalt
not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false wit-
ness, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other Com-
mandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, name-
ly, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self.

PARAPHRASE.

8. Discharge the Duties
of your respective Capacities
so faithfully, that no-
thing be omitted, which

9. For the Law designs
to prevent all Injustice to
others; and the loving our
Neighbour as our selves,
does not only imply the do-
ing him no Injury, but en-
gaging us to do him all the good we can,

10. Thus the *Second Table* is effectually satisfied: *fore Love is the fulfilling of the Law.* And so indeed is the *First* too; in regard the Christian's Love of his Neighbour is inseparable from, and founded upon, the Love of God.

11. And now to all our other Engagements to Justice and Charity, we shall do well to add that in particular, which arises from the Consideration of our present Circumstances. For the Condition of Christians calls for higher Degrees of Goodness, than either the State of Natural Religion, or the Jewish Law. We have a clearer and less distant Prospect of eternal Happiness, than either they had, who lived before Christ's Coming, or than we our selves had at our first Conversion to the Faith.

12. Every Day brings this nearer to us, and it is not fit our Zeal should abate, but much rather increase, in proportion as our Hopes advance toward Enjoyment. Darkeness and Ignorance are almost quite dispelled by the Light of the Gospel. Our Life of Sin and Error wears away apace; and a State of Glory and Perfection is approaching with speed towards us. Those scandalous Vices must therefore be abandoned, which will not endure the Light; and those Virtues acquired and exercised, which may be, at once a Defence against Temptations, and an Ornament to our Profession.

13. Intemperance and Revelling, unlawful Pleasures and unnatural Lusts, uncharitable Envyings and malicious Contentions, are things that affect Secrecy, and are attended with Shame. They cannot consist with any due regard to Modesty and Decency, and all who commit them, are industrious to conceal them.

14. How then can these be in any degree excusable in Christians, who, at their Baptism, engage most solemnly to make the Purity of Jesus Christ their constant Pattern; and His Virtues the Garb of their Souls, by which they should be * as visibly distinguished, as Men commonly are by the Garments they wear? 'Tis true indeed, no degree of Holiness exempts a Man from the Necessities of Nature; and therefore some Provision must be made for these Mortal Bodies, while we carry them about us. But every good Man will be careful to restrain this Provision to the Relief of his Wants, and the Support of his Life, without making these a Pretence for extending it to the cherishing his Lusts, and gratifying the Extravagances of a sensual Appetite, by vain and luxurious Pleasures.

C O M M E N T.

THE Design of this particular Season, and of the Devotions proper to it, is sufficiently intimated to us by this special Collect, to be the reminding Men of our Blessed Lord's Twofold Coming. The One already passed, when in *great Humility* he came to redeem us; The Other still Future, when *in his glorious Majesty* he shall come to judge us. And the Epistle, now under Consideration, recommends such pious Dispositions and Practices, as are the best Qualifications to prepare us, both for meeting him with Comfort at his Second, and for commemorating with due Decency and Devotion his First, Advent. I shall therefore endeavour to edify my Reader, in the Virtues proper to these Purposes, by proposing from this Portion of Scripture,

I. *First*, The Duties which the Apostle here urges upon every Christian: And,

II. *Secondly*, The Arguments made use of to enforce them.

I. The Duties are principally Two: Charity and Purity of Conversation. The Former comprehends all that branch of Virtue, which Divines usually distinguish by our *Duty to our Neighbour*: And this is expressly commanded here. The Latter denotes all that, which is frequently called our *Duty to our selves*. And this is the importance of those several Expressions, *Awaking out of Sleep, casting off the Works of Darkeness, putting on the Armour of Light, walking honestly as in the Day*, forsaking the Vices which are inconsistent with, and a Dishonour to, a Christian's holy Profession; *putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not making Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof*.

V. 8, 9, 10.

V. 12, 13.

V. 14.

II. My Second Head will consist of the Motives, by which the Apostle enforces these Duties: And They are likewise Two.

1. The Consideration of their Suitableness to the Gospel-State; which, in Comparison of the former Times of Ignorance and Error, is as *Light to Darknes*, and *Day to Night*. And this happy Change in our Affairs is the Effect of our Lord's First Coming.

2. The glorious Expectations, which all good Christians are taught to cherish, of Happiness and Reward unspeakable, to be obtained at their Saviour's Second Coming: Express'd here by the *Day and Salvation*. And this is thought to be yet farther press'd upon us, by representing the Shortness of our present Life, and the nearer Approaches, which that Bliss every Day makes towards us. For in this Sense some of the best Interpreters understand those Words, *Now it is high time to awake out of Sleep, for now is our Salvation nearer than when we believed; The Night is far spent, the Day is at Hand.*

Chryf. Eftius, &c. The intended Brevity of that Method, I have set my self in this Undertaking, will not allow me to enlarge upon each of these Particulars, as they very well deserve. And I the rather dispense with my self upon the present Occasion, because the Matter now before us will be offered to our Consideration hereafter. Some things shall then be spoken to more fully and distinctly, which cannot so conveniently find a room in this Discourse. I shall therefore hope, my Reader will be contented, with having several Points, which this Exhortation of the Apostle suggests to us, only propos'd to him here. While I confine my Thoughts at present to such of them only, as are peculiar to the Passage now before us, and more especially opposite to the Design of this Season.

To begin then with the First General Head, which contains the Duties enjoined here by St. *Paul*. And *First*, Of Charity, or Loving one another. Now

Now for the setting of this Matter in its true Light, it is very plain, these following Particulars are fit to be considered.

1. *First*, The Nature of this Love, or wherein it properly consists. But, because St. *Paul* hath elsewhere employed a whole Chapter upon this Matter, I beg leave to remit my Reader to that Portion of Scripture, and what I shall have to say upon it, when coming under Consideration in the Course of the Epistles.

1 Cor. xiii.
Epist. for
Quinquagesima
Sunday.

2. *Secondly*, The Object of our Love, or the Persons to whom it ought to extend. Which, though the eighth Verse here directs us in, and, by making loving *Another*, and loving our *Neighbour*, Terms equivalent, do imply, that no Person whatsoever ought to be excluded: Yet this Extent, and the Reasons for it, will be more conveniently treated of hereafter, upon the Case of the Good Samaritan, and the Question, which gave Occasion for that Parable.

Luke x. 29.
Gospel for xiii.
Sunday after
Trin.

3. *Thirdly*, The just Measure and Degree of this Virtue: We must love our Neighbour as our selves. And This also shall be adjusted, when we handle that Passage of Scripture last mentioned.

4. *Fourthly*, The vast Comprehension, and peculiar Excellence of this Love; declared here, in that it is said to be the Substance, and Sum, and Fulfilling of the Law. Our Lord says, *On these two Commandments, viz. The Love of God, and that of our Neighbour, hang all the Law and the Prophets*: Whereas St. *Paul* says here of the Love of our Neighbour alone, that it is the fulfilling of the Law. And again, *All the Law is fulfilled in One Word, even in This, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self.*

Matth. xxii. 40.
v. 8, 9, 10.

Gal. v. 14.

Now, for a right understanding of this Matter, there is not, I conceive, any Occasion for attributing to that Word, *Another*, a Signification so extensive, as should include God and our Neighbour both. But I rather choose to take the Apostle's Meaning in one of these Two Senses.

1. *First*, By the Law here he may be understood to mean the Second Table only; so limiting this Term to the Subject-matter of his present Discourse, The Duty to our Neighbour. The several Precepts hereof are contained in this Chapter: Five of them specified V. 9. and the Other, which answers to the Fifth Commandment, insisted on from V. 1st. to the 8th. And thus the Character he gives us will import thus much: That all the Branches of the Duty Men owe to each other, are reducible to, sum'd up in, and discharged by the Observance of, that one general, that most compendious Rule, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self*.

2. *Secondly*, Including the Duty we owe to God, it may very truly be said, That the First, as well as the Second Table is comprised in this Precept; because the Love of our Neighbour supposes the Love of God, as a necessary Pre-disposition. It proceeds upon, and springs out of this, as its proper Foundation and Root. For true Christian Charity is not that sort of Affection, which owes its Birth to Partiality, or Passion, or any Selfish and Worldly Considerations. It is not the result of Interest, or Nearness of Blood, or Gratitude for good Offices, or the like. These may draw the Knot closer, and are allowed to make some difference, in our Regards and Behaviour, between one Man and another. But that, which ties the Knot at first, and renders the Obligation indispensable and universal, is a Motive, as extensive as the Object of this Love it self. A Principle of Religion; A Respect to that Image of God, in which every Man resembles his Maker; A Concern
and

and Tenderneſs, for which we have that God our Pattern, who loves all that are thus allied to him. And therefore no Man does, no Man can, love his Neighbour, as a Chriſtian; who does not firſt love God, and then his Neighbour upon God's account.

This Matter may poſſibly receive ſome Illuſtration, from that Paſſage of *Hoſea*, alledged by our Lord, in Vindication of ſome Acts of Humanity and Compaſſion, for which the Pharifees calumniated Him, and his Diſciples. *Go ye, ſays he, and learn what that*

meaneth, I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice. Math. ix. 13.

And again, *If ye had known what* — xii. 7.

this meaneth, I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the Guiltleſs. By Mercy and not Sacrifice, is meant, according to the Hebrew Idiom, Mercy rather than Sacrifice. The Former denotes all thoſe good Offices, which conduce to the Comfort and Relief of Mankind. The Latter, all thoſe Religious Obſervances, whereby we expreſs our Honour and Reverence for Almighty God. So that the Oppoſition here does not lie between the Moral, and the Ceremonial Part of the Law; no, nor properly between our Duty to God, and that to our Neighbour; But the true Importance of thoſe Words I apprehend to be this: That God, having commanded us to love and ſerve Him, and having appointed Inſtances and Acts of different Kinds, whereby this ſhould be done, is content upon ſome Occaſions to ſeem to wave his Privilege. When Matters therefore ſo fall out, that we cannot attend to Mercy and Sacrifice both, He prefers Works of Charity before thoſe of Piety ſtrictly ſo called. That is, He had much rather we ſhould teſtify our Love to Him, by Acts of Kindneſs done for His Sake, to our Brethren, whoſe Neceſſities call for our Help, and who may be the better for them; than, that we ſhould neglect theſe, and employ our ſelves in the moſt ſolemn Acts of Worſhip,

which immediately regard, and terminate intirely in Himself, who neither stands in need of, nor can receive any real Advantage from them. Mercy then and Sacrifice are only two different Methods of expressing one and the same Love of God; and He esteems himself loved best and most acceptably, when we love our Neighbour for His sake.

But to enter a little deeper into this Matter. Nothing can possibly be the Object of our Love but Good; and all Goodness is in, and from, God. He is the common Source, from whence it is derived, and where it resides in its utmost Perfection. Our Neighbours have a Right to our Love, by Vertue of those Communications of Goodness, which God out of his own Fulness hath made to them. These are the next and sensible Objects, but God is the principal and ultimate one, of our religious Affection. This is but one and the same Habit in our Souls; though the Acts by which, and the Persons towards whom, it is exercised, be diversified, as fit Occasions offer themselves. Thus our Neighbour is considered as a limited, and subordinate, and derivative; but God as the sole, infinite, supreme, and original Good. The Principle then and Foundation of Love is the same in both Cases. But the Measures and the Motives of it are thus far different; that our Neighbour is to be loved for God's sake, and God for his Own sake. Consequently *He that loves another* fulfils the Law in its most comprehensive Sense; because the Second Table can be discharged by that Principle only, which secures our Obedience to the First. And, as St.

1 John iv. 20.

John declares that *Man to be a Lyar*, who professes to love God, and yet loves not his Brother; so may we most assuredly depend upon the Reverse of that Sentence, and affirm, that no Christian truly loves his Brother, who does not love God. The Former Pretence implies the Absurdity of a Cause, without its necessary and inseparable Effect; The Latter supposes an Effect,

Effect, subsisting without that Cause, which alone is sufficient to produce it.

5. The *Fifth* and Last thing, to be taken notice of here, is, The Manner of St. *Paul's* expressing our Obligation to this Duty. Which he hath done in those very significant Terms, *Owe no Man any thing, but to love one another*. He had commanded us to *render to all their dues*; and, with regard to Ver. 7. all the Engagements, which Men's Circumstances in the World make them any way Debtors to, he says here again, *Owe no Man any thing*. But then he proceeds to distinguish between the Law of Justice, and that of Charity. He represents the Former, as a Debt which may be so discharged, that we shall owe no more. The Tributes, the Customs, the Fear, the Honour, enjoined in the foregoing Verses, may be paid clear off. But this Latter of Love it seems cannot be so satisfied, that there shall rest nothing due, at the Foot of the Account. This is a very material Circumstance, and the Reasons of it may in some measure appear to us, from the following Considerations.

1. *First*, The Law of Justice and that of Charity differ in the End, which each of them is designed to serve. The things, which Justice hath in view, are, Peace and Quiet, Order, and Decency, and good Government: To the promoting and securing of these, the Wisdom of God and good Men have suited those Duties and Observances, which constitute the Body of natural and positive Laws, relating to this Matter. But the End of Charity is the General Benefit of all Mankind; and This Law takes in every Action, that can any way conduce to the Happiness of every individual Person. Supposing then our Diligence never so great, in promoting this Design hitherto; yet as oft as any new Opportunities are offered, of contributing to any Man's Good hereafter, so often there arises a fresh Obligation to do our utmost towards it,

2. *Secondly*,

2. *Secondly*, The Measures of Justice are to be taken from the particular Acts enjoined, and the several Relations wherein Men stand to one another: And when those Acts are done as the Law directs, the Person is liable to no farther Demands. These Acts again vary, as Men differ in their respective Stations. Some are peculiar to Parents, and Governors, and Superiors; Others to Children, and Subjects, and Inferiors: So that every Man's Task is set out, and the Duties of One Capacity are plainly distinguished from those of Another. But Charity does not confine itself to any Condition; it takes in a larger Compass, and considers Men, not under such or such Circumstances, but in general as Men. This Duty is common to All, and cannot be limited like the former; because it can never so happen, but that, in some kind or other, every Man living is capable of being beneficial to some, nay to every, other Man. For They, whose Hands are shortest, may yet have Hearts as large as the greatest Monarch upon Earth, and the most mean and indigent Condition cannot deprive us of the Power, by Prayers and hearty good Wishes at least, to extend our Charity all the World over.

3. *Thirdly*, The Scriptures, those of the New Testament especially, have urged this Duty of Love upon us, from such Topicks, as plainly shew, that it is a Debt never to be completely satisfied. Such in particular are the Examples of God the Father, whose Mercies are over all his Works; such the amazing Kindness of God the Son, who, by doing and suffering so great things for us, hath put it past our Ability to discharge that Obliga-

tion perfectly, of *loving one another as He hath loved us*. Nevertheless, so it hath pleased God to dispose our Affairs; that, though the utmost we can do, fall infinitely short of a just Requital; yet every Day furnishes fit Occasions of making some sort of Return, for this unparallel'd Bounty and Love. The World will alway abound with evil and unjust Men, and

John xv. 12.

consequently we can never want Opportunities of forgiving them that injure, and loving them that hate us; that is, of writing after the Copy of his marvellous Compassion, who *makes his Sun* Matth. v. 45. *to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth Rain on the just and on the unjust*; But especially of approving our selves his Children and Disciples, who *in this commended his Love towards us, that while we were yet Sinners, Christ died for us.* There will ever Rom. v. 8. be distressed and necessitous Objects to bestow our Charity upon. And these our Blessed Redeemer hath appointed his Deputies and Receivers. *In as much as ye did it to the least of these my Brethren, ye did it unto me.* We ought therefore to look upon it as a signal Blessing, that the *Poor we have always with us, and whensoever we will we may do them good:* That we can feed and cloath Mark xiv. 7. hungry and naked Christ in his suffering Members; that the Wisdom and Goodness of Providence make the Wants of some, minister Occasion to the Virtue of Others; that God accepts our Kindness to our Brethren, as Payments to himself: Nay, not as Payments only, but as transferring the Obligation: And rendering Him our Debtor, for a small part of that, which we owe, and cannot pay at all to Him immediately, and in his own proper Person.

4. To all this we may add, *Fourthly*, That the Payment of this is not like the discharge of common Debts, a Burden and a Lessening to our selves; but so suited to our Nature, so full of substantial and solid Satisfaction, so many ways recommended and made agreeable to us, that the more Good we do, the more we feel our selves still disposed to do. No part of what the greediest Man retains, yields half the Enjoyment, the sweet Complacency, the true Gain, which the Liberal Man finds, in what he expends for the Benefit of others. The Ability, and the Disposition to do good, are each of them a
par-

particular Blessing, Grace and Talent, which God entrusts us with ; and These, like all other Graces, oblige us to Thankfulness for them. But our Lord never esteems us truly thankful, except when we use and improve his Gifts, to the Purposes they properly serve. So that every Opportunity for Acts of Kindness should quicken us in the Exercise of them ; and lays a fresh Engagement upon us, to be more Zealous, more Munificent, in proportion as we find our Power encrease, and our Hearts enlarged, by those Blessings, and that Charity, which are poured upon us from above.

5. *Fifthly*, The Difference between this and other Debts is remarkable, upon account of the different Dispositions of the Persons obliged by it. Not satisfying the Debts, we contract in common Trading, proceeds from Injustice, and a sordid or negligent Temper, and is therefore scandalous and dishonourable. But it is a Mark, by which great and truly generous Minds are distinguished, never to think they have done Good enough, but greedily to embrace every fresh Occasion, and think themselves bound still to be more and more beneficial. And the supposing we have fully satisfied our Obligation of this Kind, argues the same Narrowness of Spirit, which tempts us not to satisfy all others.

Upon all these Accounts the Apostle seems to have had great Reason, for distinguishing this Debt of Love from all other Debts ; as That which alone is universal and perpetual: So far from being over-paid, that though we are always paying, yet there will be always somewhat resting due. And here I should think my self at liberty to dismiss the *First* of those Duties recommended in this *Epistle* ; were it not expedient to remove one Scruple, which some very well disposed Readers may be apt to fall into, from the latter part of my Discourse upon it.

For, if the Obligation to Charity be so unlimited, so much superior to any other, and such as we can never exceed in: If the Person, whose Debtors we are, and
whose

whose Example is our Rule and Guide in this Matter, have been pleased to interpret and accept the good Offices done to his needy Members upon Earth, as done to Himself: Will it not then become us, like honest Debtors, to strip our selves of all, that so we may go as far as ever we can, towards the discharge of this Engagement? Ought not even a convenient Subsistence, and the Provision for our Families, and those other Considerations, which are usually thought reasonable to prescribe Measures to our Liberality, to be all set aside, that we may expend our whole Substance upon so good an Account, as that of making Payment to Christ in his afflicted Representatives? This is an Objection, which may deserve to be more distinctly considered; but I shall only mention Two or Three things at present, sufficient (I hope) to set my Reader at ease, from any unnecessary Perplexities with regard to it.

Now, *First*, It must be remembred, that Charity always presupposes Justice; and consequently, no pretence of Liberality, or Mercy, can make it lawful to defraud those, in whom the Laws of Nature, or Civil Society, have vested a Right, to what would be thus distributed. God, under the Old Law, would not accept that which was stolen in Sacrifice; and our Lord, in the Gospel, upbraids the Pharisees with Hypocrisy and Barbarity, for neglecting to sustain their Parents; and thinking to justify such undutiful Treatment, by devoting that Wealth to God, which should have relieved their Distresses. Now the same Rule holds in proportion to other Relations: And where these have an antecedent Claim, to expose Them to Want, by supplying the Wants of Others, is not Bounty, but Robbery and unnatural Injustice. We must observe the Method, in which the Apostle proceeds here; first *to render to all their Dues*, and then to dispose of the Remainder, as Religion and Prudence shall direct. Luxury and Vanity should

Matth. xv. 5, 6,
7, &c.

should be no bar to our Charity: But till we have satisfied the Duty of our respective Capacities, we are not yet in a Condition of *owing no Man anything*; And therefore cannot be at Liberty, to transfer those Provisions to the Use of the Poor, for which our own Flesh and Blood may make a reasonable and just Demand upon us. From hence we may infer,

Secondly, This Obligation to Love cannot be unlimited, except with regard to the Inward Disposition: 'Tis manifest, it cannot possibly be so, with regard to the Outward Act, of Charity. These must needs be bounded, by our Circumstances in the World, by the Relations in which we stand, by the very former Acts of this kind; each of which leaves in our Power less than we had before. But though no Man's Abilities can extend to all that want, yet every Man may sincerely and earnestly wish the Succours he cannot give; and the Sincerity of those Desires he may approve by doing all the Good he can; and by praying for and promoting that which in his own Person he cannot effect. Thus his Love may, and ought to be unbounded; and in this Temper of the Mind it is, that the Essence of Charity truly consists. The Apostle, we see, supposes it possible, that

1 Cor. xiii. 3. a Man should give *all his Goods to feed the Poor*, and yet not *have Charity*: Therefore, it is neither the Act of Giving, nor the Quantity of the Gift, but the Principle from whence it proceeds, which recommends it to God's Acceptance. And our Blessed

Mar. xii. 43, 44. Saviour, by preferring the *Widow's two Mites*, before the very magnificent Contributions of many wealthy Persons, hath taught us plainly, that God will judge us by the Intensity of our Love; and that This will be measured by that Proportion, which our Liberality bears to our several Abilities and Circumstances in the World. But then it is true again,

Thirdly, That there is another Branch of this Love, in which not only the Disposition, but the Act it self, ought

ought to know no Bounds: That I mean, of bearing and forgiving Injuries. No Man is allowed to set such Measures to himself, as these; So many Wrongs I will pardon and no more; so long I will continue my Love: and then let loose the Reins to Hatred and Revenge: For here our Blessed Master's Rule takes Place, *I say unto you, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven.* Our greatest Crimes, and Mat. xviii. 22. such as we daily repeat, do not weary out the Mercy of God, though each of these deserve speedy and eternal Vengeance. And therefore the most heinous Provocations from our Brethren ought not to extinguish our Charity; or make us cease either our selves to forgive, or heartily to pray that God would forgive, even our most unreasonable, even our most implacable Enemies. Thus much, I think, may suffice at present, concerning the first Duty commanded here; and the Apostle's peculiar manner of expressing it, in those words, *Owe no Man any thing, but to love one another.*

II. I proceed now to the Second thing, urged upon us in this Exhortation, *viz.* Purity of Heart and Life. To which I shall at present say only so much, as results from the Explanation of those Figurative Terms, by which the Apostle hath recommended it to us. And they are Four:

1. *Awaking out of Sleep.* Ver. 11.
2. *Casting off the Works of Darknes, and putting on the Armour of Light.* Ver. 12.
3. *Walking honestly, as in the Day, Or,* Ver. 13.
avoiding those Vices, which are manifestly here implied, to be attended with Indecency and Shame.
4. *Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, and* Ver. 14.
(in Agreement with, or as a necessary Consequence of this) *Not making Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof.*

1. The *First* of these Metaphors compares a Life of Sensuality and Sin, to *Sleep*: and the shaking off such a dis-

dissolute Conversation, to Mens *awaking out of that Sleep*. And this I might make appear to be a very proper Resemblance, upon many Accounts; more particularly these *Three that follow*.

1. As Sleep is a Condition of Blindness and great Delusion. It entertains us with dark, and confused, and inconsistent Images of Things; which, when our waking Thoughts reflect upon, we find to have nothing in them, but Falshood and Deceit. Thus the sensual Man, who feeds and is governed by his Passions, lives, as it were, in one continued Dream. He flatters himself with wild and empty notions of things, esteems those Vanities and Excesses to be the Perfection and Happiness, which are in very deed the Blemish and Misery, of Human Nature. And all his fancied Satisfactions are so far from yielding any true Enjoyment, that, after the utmost Industry to indulge them, they leave him at last under that wretched Disappointment described by the Prophet *Isaiab*. *As when a Hungry Man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth,*
Isaiah xxix. 8. but he awaketh, and his Soul is empty; or as
when a Thirsty Man dreameth, and behold
he drinketh, but he awaketh, and behold he is faint, and his
Soul bath Appetite: So is it with all, who make the Gratification of their sensual Affections, the End and Business of Life. They pursue after something, which for a little while works strongly upon their Imaginations, sooths and tickles them with a false and treacherous Delight; But, when their Eyes are opened, and they awaken into serious and composed Thought, the Airy Idea vanishes immediately; and the Persons, who supposed themselves possess'd of most, upon a just
Psal. lxxvi. 5. Computation, find nothing in their Hands.

2. As Sleep is a State of Negligence and Inactivity. Necessary indeed this is, for the Recruit of these frail and feeble Bodies of Ours; which cannot bear continued Labour and Thought, without some Intervals of Rest, and frequent Suspensions of our Noblest Powers. But it is
 the

the Animal Life only, which receives Benefit by such Intermiſſions. To the Rational all that Time is loſt : and the Man (properly ſpeaking) is dead, to the beſt and true Purpoſes of Living. So likewiſe ſenſual Pleaſures adminiſter to the meaner and brutal part of the Soul, our Appetites and Affections ; but Reaſon and Religion are ſo far from receiving any Improvement, that they are manifeſtly impaired, by our ſtudious Gratifications of, and vehement Purſuits after them. If theſe Pleaſures be of a ſinful kind, they manifeſtly *war* 1 Pet. ii. 11.
againſt the Soul. And if they be innocent in their Kind, but immoderate in their Degree, they bring upon us a fatal Habit of Spiritual Drowſineſs ; make us unthinking and heavy in our Duty, dull to good Impreſſions, and unfit for vigorous Improvements. Like thoſe Drones who ſleep, not for Refreshment, but Wantonneſs and Sloth, we make the vacant Spaces of Life ſo many, and ſo large, that all our good Diſpoſitions languiſh and grow cold upon our Hands. The Things that are temporal and preſent, when too long dwelt upon, will render us of courſe regardleſs and inſenſible of diſtant and ſpiritual ; and leave us at laſt as little Inclination, as Leiſure, for the Diſcharge of that great Work, which God ſent us into the World about.

3. The Pertinence of this Compariſon appears yet farther, in regard Sleep is a State, liable to great Danger and Surpriſe ; ſuch as Enemies and Robbers take advantage of, becauſe we are then leaſt of all in a Condition to diſcover or prevent their Attempts upon us. And this is evidently the Caſe of a ſenſual Life. It lulls and ſtupifies Men with a falſe Security ; keeps them in Ignorance of the infinite Perils, which beſet them on every ſide ; and doth not only expoſe them to Affaults, but even aſſiſt the Adverſary againſt them. For thoſe very Affections, which ſuch Perſons are at ſo much Pains to gratifie and cheriſh, are the Engines and Inſtruments employed in the Deſtruction of Souls. Every Indulgence

of these, beyond due measure, is like drawing a Sword, and turning the Point of it upon one's own self. And they who do so, instead of standing upon their Guard, march directly up to the Mouth of the loaded Cannon, help to lay the Ambuscade, and turn their own Tempters.

Now a Life of Sobriety and severe Virtue, such as the Gospel prescribes, and the Apostle here recommends, is, on the other hand, very fitly represented by *Awaking out of Sleep*.

1. As it opens Men's Eyes, disabuses them of their Errors, teaches them to pass a right Judgment, and to make a just Computation, of things; inspires them with a generous Disdain of sordid and brutish, and puts them upon seeking every way manly Pleasures; such as are substantial and durable, spiritual and satisfactory, answerable to the Dignity, and proportioned to the Desires, of a Reasonable and Immortal Soul.

2. As it rouses Men to Action, and suffers them not to loiter away their precious Hours in idle and unprofitable living; but fires them with a vigorous Zeal, of doing good, of answering their Character, and dispatching their Master's Business, with Diligence and Cheerfulness.

3. As it gives them due Apprehensions of their Danger, and keeps a strict Guard against the Malice and Cunning, of an Enemy, who, they are sensible, lies in wait continually to destroy them. These wakeful Men, as oft as the Cares or Diversions of this Life dispose them to slumber, consider, that Death and Danger are ever at hand, and therefore they sleep in their arms. Their Appetites and Passions, I mean, are kept under strict Discipline, and their very first Motions nicely observed, and timely subdued. They know the Difficulties of the way, and take every Step, with a Wariness, becoming Men, who travel in the midst of Snares and Precipices. And thus they *awake* out of the Blindness and Delusion,

sion, the Negligence and Inactivity, and are provided against the Hazards and Surprises, of this Spiritual *Sleep*.

2. The *Second Figure*, by which this Purity of Life is express'd, we have (V. 12.) *in casting off the Works of Darknes, and putting on the Armour of Light*. By *Darknes* here may be meant, either Ignorance, or Privacy. And consequently the *Works* of it will import, Either such, as no Man in his Senses would be guilty of, did he rightly understand the natural Turpitude, which is in them; Or else such, as They who do commit, are so far ashamed of, as to affect Secrecy, and by all possible Means labour to conceal them from the Eye of the World. Night and Shades, and the privatest Corners are sought, as the only proper Scenes, for Facts, which carry their own Condemnation along with them, and brand the Actor with Infamy. He therefore would not be seen, because conscious to himself, that if seen, he must of course be disapprov'd, and despised, and detested. These then Christians must throw aside and leave off, like those tattered or sullied Garments, in which it would be a Reproach to see Company. And, in their stead such Habits must be put on, as are fit to appear in broad Day, such as will bear the nicest Observation, and make them shine as Lights in the World. And, as their Comeliness justifies the Title of *Light*; so are they very properly termed *Armour* too. For these Dispositions and Habits fortifie the Mind, and repel the Darts of the Spiritual Enemy. There being no better Preservative against Temptations, than that of being well employed, and a strict regard to the Decency of every thing we do. And these good Habits are once more said to be *put on*, with Allusion to our common Cloathing; intimating, that, as no part of the Body is left naked, which would either be offensive and unseemly to the sight, or suffer by being exposed to the Weather; so no part of the Soul should be destitute of the Virtues proper for it, no Gra-

ces wanting, which may contribute either to its Ornament, or to its Defence.

3. Another Expression of like Importance, we have in those Words, V. 13. *Let us walk honestly, as in the Day*; In Opposition whereunto are those several Vices, specified in the following part of the Verse, which draw upon Men the Scandal and Scorn of all that behold them. And this Metaphor is likewise taken from the Care Men usually take, to recommend themselves to the Esteem of Others, by a Garb clean, and decent, and suitable to their Quality. Now, since the Sight and Observation of Others is the Argument insisted upon here, Christians must be careful to take this in its just Extent. In Defe-
 * 1 Cor. xi. 10.

* Angels; and especially of Christ and God himself; One, whose Eyes are in every Place, to whom our very Hearts are open, and from whom no Secrets are hid: So that this Argument leaves no room for Hypocrisy, no covert for the private things of Dishonesty; but requires Purity in our very Thoughts and Intentions; because even These are as visible to God's all-seeing Eye, as any the most publick Indecencies, of our Garb and Behaviour, are to the Observation and Censure of Men. And, as the Respect due to those Spectators is greater far, than that we owe to any of the same Nature with our selves, tho' never so much above us in Quality and Wordly Distinctions; So are we always to remember, that, in regard of God, we act as it were upon a common Theatre; and ought no more to be guilty of the least Evil or Indecency, even in Imagination or Desire, than if we

we stood before the severest Judges, and did it in the Presence of all Mankind.

Now the vicious Practices mentioned here, are all of them such as tend to the Dishonour and Detriment of Men, and are utterly inconsistent with the Dignity and Character of Christians. Such are the Revellings and Excesses; the *Rioting and Drunkenness*; Of which this Apostle says elsewhere, *They that be drunken are drunken in the Night; But let us who are of the Day be sober.* Such the *Chambering and Wantonness*, The Lewdness and Bestialities of the Heathen, so far self condemned, even among Them, as to endeavour their own Concealment. But for Christians it is a Shame, he says, for such, even to speak of those things which were done of them in secret. Such again the *Strife and Envy*, so directly opposite to that universal Kindness and Peace, which our Blessed Master hath made the Badge and Liverry, as it were, of all who retain to Him. For by this, says he, shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have Love one to another; and accordingly we are told, *He that hateth his Brother is still in Darkness, and walketh in Darkness.* And we cannot wonder, that these Sins, of Bitterness, and Disorder, are here added to those of Luxury and Lewdness; when it is considered, how naturally Hatred and Contention spring from the Heats of Excess; and that the moderating Men's sensual Appetites and Passions, were certainly the most effectual Course, to preserve Amity and good Order in the World. The most furious Quarrels and Heart-burnings, whether public or private, are not about the necessary Supports of Life; but for those Superfluities, which feed our Lusts and our Pride, and minister to Pomp and Extravagance. And therefore, in opposition to those scandalous Qualities, which, like Filth and Rags, disparage and disfigure a Christian, we are commanded in the

1 Thes. v. 7, 8.

Ephes. v. 12.

John xiii. 35.

1 John ii. 11.

4. *Fourth* and Last Place, to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not make Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof.* Whether this Metaphor of *putting on Christ* allude to our Cloathing in general ; Or whether

Gal. iii. 27.

more particularly to that Emblem of Innocence, the White Robe formerly used to be put on at Baptism ; is no very material Enquiry. The Design of it is manifestly this. Instead of those Vicious Habits, which are a Deformity to Christians, and a Dishonour to their Profession, to recommend such Ornaments, as suit with our Condition, and will not fail to procure us respect, from those with whom we converse. And the Expression imports, that Christ should be our Pattern ; *that* His Sobriety and Gravity, His Meekness, and Moderation, and great Charity, and all the Virtues and Graces so conspicuous in Him, should be (if I may so say) the things in Fashion with all his Followers : *That* They who are out of this Mode make a very aukward and ridiculous Figure, such as derives Disgrace and Contempt upon them ; And that these Excellencies in Christ, should be as familiar to us, as inseparable from us, as evident a Distinction of our Quality, as the Apparel we constantly wear, is to our Bodies. Particularly, That we should let this World, and its Affairs and Delights, sit as loose about us as may be ; by imitating his abstemious Life, and making a difference, between the Supplies necessary for the Subsistence of our Outward Man, and the superfluous Vanities, which heighten its Appetites, enflame its Passions, and indulge it in Luxury and Sin. Some *Provision* we may, nay we ought to *make for the Flesh* ; such as may preserve it, in the Condition God hath set it in, as a Servant and Instrument to the Spirit : Such as may render it fit for Duty, and preserve it in Obedience to the higher and commanding part of us. But, as our Creator hath appointed the Body in a State of Subordination to the Soul : So all the Comforts and Delights of it should aim, not at Enjoyment, but Use ; and be directed

directed to the Benefit of that Better Part, of which the Man, and the Happiness of his Nature, principally consists. And this is a Caution, highly seasonable, and pertinent to the Apostle's Design ; in regard that all the Vices mentioned before, and whatsoever else is either a Blemish or an Obstruction to the Spiritual and Divine Life, proceed from an undue Preference of the Bodily and Fleshly Part, and making the Gratifications of, and Care for That, the main End and Measure of our Actions.

II. I have now at length done with the Duties enjoined, and pass to my *Second* General Head, The Motives made use of here to enforce them. Which are contained in those Words, *And that knowing* Ver. 11, 12.
the time, that now it is high time to awake
out of sleep, for now is our Salvation nearer than when we
believed. The Night is far spent, the Day is at hand.
 These Passages admit of a Two-fold Interpretation, each of which furnishes an Argument very pertinent to the Apostle's Purpose.

I. For *First*, Some by the *Night* and the *Day* understand the Darkness of the Times before, and the Light of those under, the Gospel ; And these, by
Salvation being nearer than when they be- Rom. iii. 11.
lieved, do suppose St. Paul to mean, the Advantages, which these *Romans*, who acknowledged a *Messias* already come, now enjoy'd, above what belonged to them, while only expecting the promised *Messias* yet to come.

The Force of the Argument, taken in this Sense, lies here ; That it highly concerns Men to consider the Blessings of a clearer Revelation, and the Profit God expects they should make of it : *That* they are obliged to improve in Holiness, proportionably to the Means and Opportunities of living better, put into our Hands : *That*, after so full Instructions and so bright an Example, as those of the Holy and Merciful Jesus, it would be a most indecent, a most inexcusable Absurdity ; if They, who are
 C 4 called

called his Disciples, and profess to tread in his Steps, should abandon themselves to the Works of Malice and Shame; and be so far from the signal Virtues, which Christians ought to be distinguished by, as even to lose the Bowels and the Modesty of Common Men. Thus the Consideration of our Lord's *First* Advent, the Doctrines he taught, and the Copy he hath set us, serve the Design of this Exhortation very well. But for any farther Enlargement upon this Construction of the Words,

* See Epist. for
Epiph.

I must refer my Reader to * another Place; and at present satisfy my self with representing the Arguments contained in them,

when interpreted of our Lord's Second Coming. For,
2. Every Reader of the New Testament must needs have observed the frequent mention made there of One Day, eminent and remarkable above all the rest. One

* Heb. x. 25.

† 2 Tim. iv. 8.

‡ Luke. xvii. 24.

** 1 Cor. v. 5.

2 Thes. v. 2.

Phil. ii. 16.

†† 2 Pet. iii. 12.

‡‡ Acts iii. 12.

* Matt. xii. 36.

2 Pet. ii. 9.

stiled upon this Account by way of particular Designation, * *The Day*, † *That Day*: Called elsewhere, ‡ *The Day of the Son of Man*, ** *The Day of the Lord Jesus Christ*, †† *The Day of God*, ‡‡ *The Day of Restitution* or final Consummation of *all Things*, * *The Day of Judgment*: And distinguished by many other Titles, which denote, that in that Day the Glory of Christ

shall shine forth in its full Lustre; that a perfect Discrimination shall then be made between the Good and Bad, and every Man receive an eternal Recompence, according to the things done in his Body. This Day many Expositors understand here, as represented still future, by that Expression of being *at hand*: whereas the Day of Gospel-Light, and Christ's first Advent, was already come upon these *Romans*, and could not so properly be described, as yet approaching. Thus the *Night* here will answer to the present Life, a State of Wandering, and Weakness, and great Imperfection. And

Ver. 11.

the Salvation will import that Bliss, which
the

the Faithful expect and depend upon, when that righteous Judge shall save all them, who persevere in good Works, and live and die in his Fear.

Now, admitting the Ignorance and general Depuration of former Ages, to be well resembled by the Darkeness of the *Night*; and the Perfection of good Men in the next World, by the bright shine of the *Day*: We may still discern, between these Two, discern a middle State of Things, answerable to the Springing of the Morning, and the Rising of the Sun. A Dawn sufficient to guide our Feet into the way of Happiness and Peace; though infinitely short of the Comforts and Glories of that Blessed Noon, when all the Clouds of Sin and Infirmary shall be scattered, and we shall see and be like that God, who is *Light* so pure, that *in Him is no Darkeness at all*. Thus we may find good Reason, why *the Night* should ^{1 John i. 5.} under this Gospel-State be represented as *far spent*, but not absolutely done away; and *the Day* said to be *at hand*, though not come in its full Strength. For frail Mortality will always have some remains of Shadow and Dusk. The brightest Virtue, and the clearest Knowledge, stop vastly short of that Perfection of both, which will break upon Wise and Good Men, and hereafter, at the Resurrection of the Just.

This Day is very differently described, according to the different Condition of the Persons to be concerned in it. With regard to the Wicked, in Circumstances full of Terror, as that, which shall *discover the hidden things of dishonesty; bring the Secrets of all Hearts* into Judgment; and pour upon such the Wrath and Vengeance of a provoked, and then implacable, God. To the Righteous, as a Day, which shall manifest their good Deeds to all the World; crown them with publick Praise and everlasting Bliss; accomplish their Redempti-

1 Cor. iv. 5.
Rom. ii. 16.
Rom. ii. 5.
Rev. vi. 17.
Matt. vii. 23.
Matt. xxv. 34,
&c.
2 Tim. iv. 8.
Rom. viii. 23.
Luke xxi. 28.
1 Cor. xiii. 12
xv. 53, 54.

on;

1 John iii. 2. on ; abundantly compensate their past Sufferings ; answer and exceed their largest Hopes ; and confer upon them that indefectible Holiness and Wisdom, which they, in the mean while, so zealously aspire, so eagerly pant after.

This Latter, and more comfortable, part of the Argument, is what the Apostle insists upon, in the Passage now before us. The rather probably, that he might soften the Persecutions and Afflictions, which Christians then lay under, by the prospect of so glorious a Recompence ; and by putting them in mind, that they were, every Day and Hour, advancing nearer to the End of their Troubles, and to that Salvation, in which they were taught to place their All, their only Happiness. Thus wisely providing against that too common Weakness, even in People of sincere and good Intentions, who often set out at first with Warmth, and Vigour, and vehement Desires ; but are apt, in process of time, to cool and languish, and grow remiss, or weary of well-doing. Here then he hints the Folly, and the Sin, of slackening our Endeavour, when, like Racers, we ought rather to quicken our Pace, and to exert our selves more and more, in Proportion as we draw toward the Goal. For the Prize is given to none, who do not come up thither ; we must finish, as well as begin, well ; and Perseverance is the only thing, which can secure all our past'd Labour, though never so commendable hitherto, from being at last *in vain in the Lord*.

Now, what can be a more effectual Spur to the Virtues recommended here, than the Consideration of such a Day ? If any thing have the Power to enlarge our Hearts, and open our Hands, in entire Affection and unbounded Charity ; surely this Reflection must do it, that these Dispositions, and Acts of Beneficence, are the very

Matt. xxv, 34. &c.

Marks, which shall then distinguish the Sheep from the Goats. If any thing prevail for the effectual Mortification of our brutal Appetites

tites

tites and Passions; the Excellence of this Salvation sure will quicken and confirm this good Resolution in us. If any thing support us under the Afflictions of the World, and the Difficulties of Religion; it is the nearer Approach of that blissful Reward, which, if rightly estimated, would make us more than Conquerors.

Much weaker Arguments than These are 1 Cor. ix. 25.
 successful, with them who strive for a corruptible crown; And what stupid Wretches are We, if we faint and give out, notwithstanding Encouragements infinitely greater, when striving for a Crown incorruptible? We, I say, whose Gain is inestimable, whose Conflict is but short, and whose Day (in respect of Death at least, which will determine the eternal State of every Man's Soul) may, without a Figure, be most truly said to be *at hand*, and even at the door. Shake off then (my Brethren) shake off your Sloth from this very moment; Awake, for it is high time that we should All awake, to Righteousness. Let us up and be doing, every one of us; and so remember that Condescension of our Lord, *when he came to visit us in*

great Humility; that our Loins may be girt, our Lights burning, and our Lamps trimm'd, Luke xii. 35.
1 Pet. i. 13.
 that is, our Souls adorned with all those Graces and Good Works, which may prepare and fit us to meet this great King decently, *when he shall come to judge us in his Glorious Majesty.* Collect. So shall we rise *to the Life Immortal,* and, being found such as *had put on the Lord Jesus now in the time of this Mortal Life,* shall live and reign with him, *who liveth and reigneth with the Almighty Father and the Holy Ghost, now and ever, Amen.*

There are some Inferences from the foregoing Particulars, proper to have been added here, but this Comment having already exceeded its just Bounds, the Reader is desired to consult the Epistles and Gospels already noted in the Margin.

See Mark xi.

Luke xix.

John xii.

PARAPHRASE.

1, 2, 3. As our Lord one day was passing with his Disciples from Bethany towards Jerusalem (shortly after his raising Lazarus from the Dead, and five days before the Passover, at which he suffered) when they were as far on their way as Bethphage, and near the foot of the Mount of Olives, Then, &c.

4, 5. This was not done by Jesus, with any Design to relieve himself from the Toil and Weariness of a long Journey (for the distance between Jerusalem and Bethany is but small) nor do we find him consulting his Ease after this manner, in much longer Travels; But he had other Reasons in view, and particularly, that, by this approach to the Holy City, a Prophecy of Zechariah's might be fulfilled in Him, which the ancient Jews constantly understood of the Messiah. Now this foretels matter of great Joy to Jerusalem, upon the Account of a King, who should distinguish himself from other Princes, by an Entry full of humble and most unusual Pomp: such as should express the Meekness of his Mind, and the Nature of his Dominion.

7. After having satisfied the Owners, who questioned them about loosing these Beasts; with their leave they brought them; and, instead of riding Furniture, made use of their own Cloaths, and thus Jesus rode.

8. Great numbers of the People also assisted at this Solemnity; They came out of the City to meet him; They performed such Ceremonies of Joy and Respect, as were customary in publick Rejoicings; particularly, with the Jews at their most splendid Feast, that of Tabernacles, and at the Inauguration of their Kings.

The GOSPEL.

S. Matth. xxi. 1.

1. **W**HEN they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two Disciples,

2. Saying unto them, Go ye into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3. And if any Man say ought unto you, ye shall say, the Lord hath need of them, and straightway he will send them.

4. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet, saying,

5. Tell ye the Daughter of Sion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass.

6. And the Disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them.

7. And brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their cloaths, and set him thereon.

8. And a very great Multitude spread their garments in the way; Others cut down branches from the trees, and strowed them in the way.

9. And

9. *And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.*

the Prosperity of this long expected King, this promised Seed of *David*. And these they uttered in the Prophetick Words of *David* himself, who many Ages ago foresaw this Kingdom, and whose Expressions were so understood to belong to it, as frequently to be inserted into the solemn Devotions of those ancient Jews, who believed and longed for it.

10. *And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?*

der. To whom the Multitudes justified themselves, by acknowledging openly, that they paid these Honours to that eminent Prophet, *Jesus*. The Pharisees also, moved with Envy and Indignation at such publick Respects, would have had *Jesus* put a stop to them. But he returned such an answer, as intimated the People to have been governed by a Divine Impulse; and then,

11. *And the multitude said, This is Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

12. *And Jesus went into the Temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the Temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves.*

self. For he now purged the Temple (a second time, as he had done at another Passover three years before) of those, who kept a publick Mart there, in the Court of the Gentiles. This they did for the Convenience of selling Birds and Beasts for Sacrifice, and returning Money for such as came from distant parts of the Country up to this Festival.

13. *And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

that Holy Place. A Place designed for the Publick Worship, but converted by Them into an open Market. Nor was it polluted by their Traffick only, but by the Injustice of the Gains they made there. Well therefore might they be accused on this Occasion of making *God's House* a Den of Thieves; since the Profit extorted by Fraud and Oppression is no better than downright Robbery, and the Exercise of such Trades in a consecrated Place, was so far from its primitive Institution, that it made their Injustice to become Sacrilege.

9. In this solemn Procession they conducted him to the City, shouting forth Acclamations, and Prayers to God for

10. This Proceeding filled all the Inhabitants of *Jerusalem* with won-

der. This Proceeding filled all the Inhabitants of *Jerusalem* with wonder, by acknowledging openly, that they paid these Honours to that eminent Prophet, *Jesus*. The Pharisees also, moved with Envy and Indignation at such publick Respects, would have had *Jesus* put a stop to them. But he returned such an answer, as intimated the People to have been governed by a Divine Impulse; and then,

12. Having suffered his Kingdom and Divine Authority to be thus proclaimed by Others, he proceeds to exert it Him-

13. These he rebuked, by reminding them of the Prophet's Words, and so exposing their Abuse of

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this Day relates Two very remarkable Actions of our Blessed Saviour.

1. The

1. The *First*, his solemn Entry into *Jerusalem*.

2. The *Other*, His Behaviour in the Temple there.

The Latter of these I reserve for that Account given of it by St. *Luke*, which will offer it self to our Consideration hereafter; and at present will confine my Dis-

Gospel for x
Sunday after
Trinity.

course to the Former *only*. And here again there would arise several Reflections, which I must be content to recommend to

the Improvement of my Reader's private Meditation. Such as these that follow.

1. The Divine Knowledge and Power of our Blessed Lord. The Former, in foretelling where, and in what Manner, his Disciples should find the Beasts proper for his purpose upon this Occasion. The Latter, in inclining the Hearts of Persons at a distance, to so ready a Compliance with his Demands.

2. His Meekness and Condescension; In giving the Owners Satisfaction, and asking their Consent; that so no Man's Property might so much as seem to be invaded by any Order of his; though at the same time he were, in the strictest Sense, what he styles himself, *the Lord*, and had a Right antecedent and superior to, those very Possessors, of whom he sent to borrow.

3. The Cheerful Obedience of these Disciples to a Command, which carnal Reasoning might have started many Objections against; and which nothing less than a stedfast Persuasion, that He, who sent the Message, would be sure to give Success to it, could have prevailed upon them to execute, as they did, without any demur or delay.

4. The Mystical Importance of these Beasts; The One an Afsinured to Burthens and Labour; The Other a Colt unbroken *on which never Man had sat*. By which we may understand, with *Some, The Jews long accustomed

to

Ver. 3.
Mar. xi. 5, 6.
Luke xix. 33,
34.

Luke xix. 30.
* Chrys. Tom. 5.
Serm. 140. p. 83.
Ed. Eton.

to the Mosaical Yoke; and the Gentiles, who had hitherto walked in the Imaginations of their own Hearts, and (as St. *Paul* expresses it) *lived without God in the World*. Or else we may, * with Others, apply the Passage to the Rational, and the Sensible, Principle in every Man's Breast. For Either way the Parallel will hold: That even the rudest and wildest Heathens, even the most stubborn and unruly Passions, are made teachable and tame, when they submit themselves to Christ. And, as His Design was to unite all Nations in his Body; so when his Grace and Doctrine are our Guides, when He sits Supreme and rules in all the Faculties of our Souls, then do our most Carnal Appetites move aright, and we march triumphantly, under his Direction, into the Heavenly *Jerusalem*.

Fphef. ii. 12.
* Justin Mart.
in Tryph.
page 272.
Ed. Paris 1636.

There is yet another Improvement, made by Some, of these Disciples loosing the As and the Colt: who take Occasion from hence to treat of absolving Sinners. But This, and some other Inferences upon the Place, are so remote from what the Literal Sense suggests, that I can hardly think them worth the mentioning. And even those already mentioned, ought to give Place to the Three following Particulars, which I shall make the Subject of my present Discourse. Now they are,

Catech. ad
Paroch.

I. *First*, The Time of this solemn Entry into *Jerusalem*.

II. *Secondly*, The Circumstances and Ceremonies peculiar to it. And,

III. *Thirdly*, The Significance of it, and the Ends served by it.

I. The Time of this solemn Entry is very punctually fixed by St. *John*. He acquaints us, that *Six Days before the Passover* our Lord came to *Bethany*, and was there entertained at Supper; that *Lazarus*, whom he had lately raised from

John xii. 1, 2,
12, 13.

from the Dead, dwelt there; and that he sat at Meat with him: and afterwards he says, that on the next Day (the fifth before the Passover inclusive) *much People came forth to meet him, and took Branches of Palm-trees, and cried Hosanna*; So conducting him into the Holy City, with all those Demonstrations of Joy and Respect, described at large in the Gospel for this Day. Now herein we may discover a very remarkable Mystery, by comparing this Action with the Old Law relating to the

Jewish Passover. The first Circumstance whereof is, That, on the *Tenth Day of the First Month*, the Paschal Lamb should be drawn out from the rest of the Flock, in order to be slain the *Fourteenth* of the same Month. Our Lord's

See Ainsw. in
Exod. xii.

Approach then to *Jerusalem* in this unusual Manner answers, in point of Time, to the Separation of the Lamb, designed for the Paschal Sacrifice. The Gaiety and

Pomp of this Approach agrees exactly with the Garlands, and Processions, and Shouts, and other Marks of Joy, usual (we are told) with the Jewish, and almost all People, in leading their Victims to the Altar. So then, it was not without particular good Reason, that our Lord admitted these significant Ceremonies, at so critical a Juncture. For to Any, who observe things nicely, they will appear exceeding seasonable and proper, for accomplishing those Figures and Types under the Levitical Dispensation, of which he was the intended End and Substance. This was the True, the Universal, the Only effectual, Passover, which turned away the

1 Cor. v. 8.

Wrath of God and his destroying Angel; which preserves his People from the dire effects of Sin and Vengeance, and works a perfect Reconciliation, by his precious Blood, for as many as are sprinkled with and washed in it. This Lamb of God did therefore, on the Day appointed by *Moses*, come forth from *Bethphage*, (a * Village belon-

* Adricom.
Theatr. Terr.
Sanctæ.

belonging to the Priests, from whence the Beasts reserved for Sacrifice were drawn out, for the Service of the Temple) He came forth, a most Holy and Unblemished Sacrifice, with all the chearful Pomp customary upon such Occasions, with all the Marks of Triumph, which became so Willing, so Beneficial, so Victorious a Death. A Death which alone fulfilled what Others of this nature could but faintly represent; And at once subdued, those hitherto invincible Destroyers of Mankind, Guilt, and Hell, and Death. This Lamb might be truly said, from all these Demonstrations of Gladness, not so properly to be Led, as to Offer himself to the Slaughter, He had formerly declared, *No Man taketh my Life from me, but I lay it down of myself.* And, by these first Steps towards his Suffering, he shewed, with what Resolution he advanced to his last Conflict; with what Readiness and Chearfulness of Mind he suffered. It is also observed by a Learned Author of our own Nation, that the High Priest, some Days before the Solemnity of the Yearly Atonement, did separate himself from his Family and all civil Conversation, the better to prepare for the Sacred Offices of that Season; And, that he was then conducted from his own House to the Temple, with great Pomp: To this our Lord's triumphant Entry into the Holy City might likewise allude; who, five Days before his Passion, was thus attended to the Temple, before his offering that Great Sacrifice of Himself, which expiated the Sins of the whole World.

John x. 18.

See Selden L. iii.
de Synedr. c.
11. p. 7.Bp. Patrick on
Levit. xvi. 3.

My *Second* Observation regards the Circumstances and Ceremonies peculiar to this Action. In which we shall find somewhat very distinguishing, both as To the Persons who contributed to the Pomp of it, and as To the Manner of the Thing it self.

1. The Persons are described to have been a mixed Multitude, consisting of Disciples

Luke xix.

D

and

and Common People. Such as were moved to do thus, from the Doctrines and Miracles which they had heard and seen; and who, from a deep and reverend Sense of our Lord's Divine Power, were very forward to pay him what Honour they could. St. *John* observes to this purpose, the more immediate Oc-

Ver. 17, 18. casion of their extraordinary Respect at this time; *The Poople* (he says) *that was with*

him, when he called Lazarus out of his Grave, and raised him from the Dead, bare record. For this cause also the People met him, for that they heard, that he had done this Miracle. So that the Qualifications, chiefly remarkable in the Assistants at this Ceremony, are not the Quality or outward Splendor, the Wealth or the Reputation, the Learning or the eminent Posts: but the Sincerity and honest Zeal, the hearty Affection to Christ, and the firm Persuasion of his being the true Messias, with the wonderful things he taught, and did, had wrought in their Minds. And These to Him, who is no Respecter of Persons, who came to set up a Kingdom not of this World, rendred those Tributes of Praise and Acknowledgment, from Men mean and insignificant, as to any temporal Respects, were more acceptable, more becoming his Character, more truly for his Honour, than any dissembled or interested Homage of Rulers or Rabbies, the Greatest or the Wisest of the Sanhedrim could have been. For external Advantages are of no Consideration with God, while they want Good Dispositions within to recommend them.

2. The Manner of this Solemnity was likewise very singular. Instead of numerous Guards and triumphal chariots, and costly Preparations, we find only the Attendance of a vulgar and despised Crowd. The Person, for whom these Honours were designed, riding in humble Poverty upon a borrowed Ass; and the way before him, not covered with Tapestry or rich Furniture, but strewed with Branches hastily cut down from Trees, and
the

the Garments of them who made up the Train. The Songs and Acclamations applied to this Occasion, did not tell of bloody Battles fought, of Victories obtained at the Expence of Infinite Toil and Treasure, of Countries miserably haras'd, and reduced by Fire and Sword; but rehears'd the Mercies of God, long expected, and now fulfilled, in the peaceful Reign of the Messiah. That Son of *David*, who should turn Men's *Swords*

into Plowshares, and their Spears into Pruning Hooks, by establishing such Laws

Isa. iv.

Mic. ii.

as (if duly observed,) would effectually curb and quiet those general Disturbers of Mankind, Envy, and Avarice, and Ambition. Such as would settle the World in profound and perfect Tranquillity, upon Principles of Justice and Contentedness, invincible Meekness, and mutual Love. This therefore was a Pomp, in all its parts so distant from those of common Princes, that in Comparison of Them, it might look almost like a Mock-Triumph. And we may truly say, that our Lord's Humility never appeared in more distinguishing Characters than in this single Instance of his seeming to take Greatness and State to himself. Accordingly we find an eminent Prophecy fulfilled herein, which had, some Ages before, pointed out the Messiah, by an Approach to the Holy City, which had a sort of Splendor peculiar to it self. Such as was

Ver. 5.

Zech. ix. 9.

never parallell'd by any other King: Such as expressed the Lowliness of his Mind, and the Meanness of his worldly Circumstances, even while it set forth the Royalty of his Person. And hence no doubt it is, that St. *Matthew* took such care to remind the Jews of that memorable Prediction. Thus challenging them, as it were, to produce any Example of its being duly accomplished, except in the Person and by this Action, of Our *Jesus*. *All this was done, says he, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Prophet, &c.* Which is in effect to argue thus: If *Zechariah* did (as the Jews con-

fess he did) by the King in that Prophecy intend the promised Messias; then the Messias must come to *Jerusalem* in such a Manner as answers that Description: But *Jesus* did, and no other Person ever did, distinguish himself by coming to *Jerusalem* in this Manner: Therefore *Jesus*, and no other, is the true Messias, whom that Prophet had in view. And thus I am, almost unawares, got within the Compass of my Third Particular, which is,

III. The Significance of, and the Ends served by, this Action. The Evangelist indeed takes express notice of no other End, than the utmost and exact Completion, which it was necessary that Prophecy should meet with; But I think, we may very reasonably conclude, that some other Purposes of great Importance were served by it. Particularly these that follow:

I. These Honours were of use to vindicate our Lord's Innocence, and to do right to his Character, by leaving respectful Impressions of him upon Men's Minds, at a time so Critical as this, which immediately preceded the Ignominy of his Crucifixion.

At a former Passover, when the People, in Admiration of his Miracles, would have paid him Kingly Honours, he withdrew, and refused that unseasonable Testimony of their Zeal. Partly (as we may probably conjecture) because their Eagerness had a mixture of worldly Considerations in it; and partly, because the accepting those Honours then, would have been liable to Misinterpretation, and might have obstructed the Efficacy of his Preaching. But now the Course of his Prophetick Office was finished; Now the People proceeded upon other Motives; and therefore he offers himself to be treated, as became their Conviction of his Divine Power

and Truth. And, (as he afterwards confessed before *Pilate*, so) he now suffers Them publickly to acknowledge and proclaim, his Royal Dignity. And thus he thought

thought fit to do ; As for other Reasons, so perhaps not least of all for This, that these free and solemn Acknowledgments might be for a Balance against the Shame and Scandal of his Cross. And an Over balance they will be, with judicious and impartial Considerers ; When it is observed, that his Death was the Contrivance of a restless Party, enraged with Envy and Malice, obstinately prejudiced by Secular Interest, and jealous of his growing Greatness in the Esteem of the People ; But that, on the other hand, these Poms and Acclamations were the Effect of great Sincerity, and an honest Reverence for one, who, they verily believed, had fully answered all the noble Predictions concerning the Messias ; One, who must of necessity be that very Person, so long promised, so impatiently expected, so punctually described by the Ancient Prophets. This Opinion and Behaviour in the People was the natural Effect of Christ's Actions and Doctrine. The same they would have had upon all who saw and heard them, had all who saw and heard, but considered them, as these disinterested Men did ; without the blinding of Passion, or the Biass of worldly and private Respects. Thus it appeared, that all the barbarous Indignities put upon *Jesus* afterwards, did not speak the general Sense of the Jewish Nation, but only shewed the Spight of a governing Faction. Nor ought there any great Stress to be laid upon the Multitudes, which were then drawn into a Compliance with their Superiors. Since the Subtle Management of Men in Post and Power, and the Easiness and Servile Fears usual in those of a mean depending Condition, make such sudden Changes not at all surprizing. Nor is it new to find even the Consciences of the Vulgar in perpetual Bondage to those Great Masters, whose Tyranny expects to have their very Souls at its Devotion. And therefore Mens Judgments and Inclinations are never to be known by their Behaviour, when any such Checks are upon them ; But must be measured by what they

do (as in the case before us) when at their own Disposal; when under no Influence from the Example of their Superiors; nor in any Apprehensions of Displeasure, if they do not follow Them to do Evil.

2. As this Solemn Entry was a Declaration of Christ's Kingdom, So the Circumstances peculiar to it were very Significant Intimations, of what Nature and Quality that Kingdom should be. Not one of this World, nor of any Affinity to such, whose Pomp were so very unlike those of Earthly Princes, that They only, who behold them with an Eye of Faith, can discern any thing of Splendor and true Greatness in them. This Inauguration was but a more formal Introduction to the Death of the King celebrated by it. And the Persons, and Methods, and every part in it were (as I said before) so many Marks of Poverty, and Humility, and Meekness, Neglect and Contempt of the World and its Gaieties. This Throne was erected in the Hearts of Men; and its Excellence consisted, not in the Figure, or the Numbers, but in Virtues and Holy Dispositions, of its Subjects. And certainly our Blessed Lord could not have taken a more effectual Course, for refuting and correcting that vain Imagination of the Messiah's Earthly Dominion, at his first Coming; than by ordering Matters so, that this only Instance of his receiving Princely Honours, should be so directly opposite to the Customary Forms of Triumphs, and Inaugurations, among Temporal Princes: And then, by permitting such reproachful Treatment, such barbarous Cruelty, such Pain and Suffering, such universal Insolence and Scorn, to prevail against him, in that Passion and Crucifixion, to which this Procession was, as it were, the Preface and first setting out. For,

3. Another End served by these uncommon Respects, paid to our Blessed Saviour at that Time, was the ministering fresh Matter, for the Malice of his Enemies to work upon, and opening a more direct Passage to his bitter and ignominious Death. St. *Peter* observes most truly,

truly, that *Jesus* was delivered up to Death by *the Counsel and Foreknowledge of God*; and, that nothing passed in this whole Matter, but what his Almighty Wisdom *had before determined to be done*. But still They, who conspired that Death of his, were left to their own Devices, and acted upon Principles and Choice so free, that the whole was brought about by human and ordinary Means. It is one marvellous Instance of the Divine Wisdom and Power, to permit the Unrighteousness of Men, without any just Imputation of the Guilt contracted by it : And then to make those Sins, which are not thought fit to be restrained, instrumental to excellent Purposes. Purposes, altogether unknown to the Actors, and foreign to, nay sometimes destructive of, their Designs in committing them. And never was the Glory of these Attributes more eminently illustrated, than in the sufferings of our Dear Redeemer. God had indeed ordained, that his innocent Son should die by the inveterate Malice and Barbarity of the Jews : but That Malice and Barbarity were intirely their own. And therefore the Apostle, who mentions the *Council and Determination of God*, as to the Event ; does not forbear, as to the Quality of the fact, to pronounce those Hands *Wicked*, by which the Holy *Jesus was Crucified and Slain*. Now the Reason of this is obvious. For those very Actions of our Lord, which should have won the Jews over to a Belief of and Reverence for him, were by their Prejudice and Envy so perverted, as to become so many fresh Provocations to their Malice, for hastening his intended Destruction. Thus the Miracle upon *Lazarus* in particular, which (as was shewed before) put the unprepossessed Multitudes upon celebrating the Glories of this Mighty Prophet, had a quite different Operation upon the jealous Rulers. For *from that Day forward they took Counsel together to put him to Death*. Nor did their

Acts ii. 23.

Acts iv. 28.

Acts ii. 23.

John xi. 53.

Spight stop there ; But, enraged at the Influence this Miracle had upon the People, they were for removing out of the way, that very Person, who was the living Testimony of it ; and *consulted to put Lazarus also to*

John xii. 10, 11. *Death ; Because that by reason of him, many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus.*

We are not much to wonder, if Men, so unreasonably bent upon Mischief, were exasperated, upon every Expression of Inclination and Zeal, for so hated a Rival in the Affections of the People. And hence it was, that the Pomp and Acclamations of this Day's Gospel, however mean and despicable in themselves, yet meeting with Minds already inflamed and sore, galled them to that implacable Degree, implied in that Reflection upon

John xii. 19. *them, perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold the World is gone after him.* This

quickned them in their Measures, and confirmed them in the Expedience of his dying for the People, in that

Matt. xxvi. 2, 3. *wicked Sense, intended by Caiaphas. And accordingly, two Days after, they strike*

up their Bargain with Judas to betray him. Thus our Lord, who foresaw every Consequence distinctly, suffered the officious Respects of a well-meaning Multitude, to draw on his Passion ; by exasperating his Blood-thirsty Enemies, and rendring them more vigorous and impatient, in the Execution of their villainous Designs.

4. I can by no means think it unreasonable to believe, that our Lord admitted of these Honours from the People,

as he did the costly Ointment the *Day before, not meerly for the Value of the things themselves, but in a great measure

for the Mysteries represented by them. The Ceremonies and *Hosanna's*, applied to Jesus upon this Occasion, seem more peculiarly to have belonged † to the Feast of Tabernacles. A Festival, instituted to commemorate the Israelites dwelling in Tents or Booths, when

* Comp. John xii. 3. & 12.

† Levit. xxiii. 39, 40.
Answo. in loc.

when they came up out of the Land of *Ægypt*. * But if we allow any such Typical Importance in This, as the Scriptures expressly attribute to some Other Jewish Festivals; When could those Boughs, those Praises and Prayers, be so fitly, so significantly used, as in Honour to this † *Stem out of the Root of Jesse*: To that Righteous Servant, whose Name is * the *Branch*; To that Son of God who (as the Evangelist expresses it) † ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, vouchsafed to pitch his Tent among Men; to dwell in a *Tabernacle* of Human Flesh; and who therefore was now celebrated with *Hosanna's*, upon so many Accounts his own?

* 1 Cor. v. 8.

† Isai. xi. 1.

* Zech. iii. 8.
vi. 12.

† John i. 14.

Again, In regard our Lord himself declares, that *Mary* anointed his Body to the Burial, though it does not certainly appear to us, that she had any such End of that Action in view

Matt. xxvi. 12.
John xii. 7.

at the time of doing it; What should hinder us from inferring, by Parity of Reason, that these Multitudes, and all their triumphant Pomp (tho' not by them design'd for such a Purpose) were a Type and Prelude, of our Lord's Resurrection, and Ascension to the Right Hand of God? Nay, to that more glorious and more triumphant Pomp of the General Judgment? For then shall this, once meek and humble, King come with the Attendance, not of young Children and a vulgar Train, but Troops of Angels and Blessed Spirits innumerable. In a Figure, as becoming an Universal Conqueror and Lord; as this before us was suitable to the Character and Condescension of a suffering Saviour. Then shall the Shouts of Heavenly Hosts awaken the whole World from their Sleep of Death: And strike his Enemies with a Terror and Confusion, to which the Consternations, upon this Approach to *Jerusalem*, bear some, though but a feeble, Resemblance. And indeed these seem such Meditations, as the Church designed to carry our Thoughts forward to, in a more especial manner, by introducing with

this Portion of Scripture, a Season of more than ordinary Devotion; The Two great Uses whereof are, to dispose us for commemorating our Lord's First, and to assist us in making due Preparation for his Second, *Advent*.

Now to this Preparation somewhat considerable may be contributed, by those many practical Inferences, which naturally result from the foregoing Particulars. I instance at present in these *Four* only.

1. The Example of our Blessed Master, advancing so chearfully towards his Sufferings, should animate and confirm all his Disciples, in taking up their Cross, when it shall please God at any time to lay it before them. It should fortifie them against such Sufferings especially, as more directly tend to the Service of the Truth, and to the Benefit of their Brethren. Nor ought it in those cases to damp our Resolution and Zeal, that we suffer wrongfully, or for Them, who have not merited well at our Hands. For in these Respects, above all, is the Blessed Jesus our Pattern; who was so well contented to be betrayed into the Hands of wicked Men, and to die upon a Cross, *the Just for the Unjust. He who knew no Sin, was made Sin for us, that we might be made the Righteousness of God in Him:* And, except we endure, *not only patiently, but even contentedly and gladly, when the Honour of God, and the Salvation of our Souls, are like to be the Consequence of our Afflictions; we do by no means copy after him, who bath herein left us an Example, that we should follow his Steps.*

1 Pet. iii. 18.

2 Cor. v. 21.

1 Pet. ii. 21.

2. Well were it, if the Circumstances peculiar to this Action were so considered, as to regulate Men's Behaviour, when Honour, and Greatness, and Fame, endanger their Prudence and their Virtue. If they would prevail for such a Deportment, even in the most shining Merit, even in the most exalted Station, that their Humility and Constancy of Mind might never cease to be conspi-

conspicuous. If, even in their gayest Intervals, they would admit seasonable Reflections, *That* they are moving toward Death apace; *That* the Condition of Humane Nature allows but a short Enjoyment of these Advantages, putting the very best of the Case; *That* they are exceeding apt to cut themselves yet shorter, by setting an Edge upon the Envy of Others, and irritating the Malice of jealous Competitors, to hasten the Destruction, and rise upon the Ruins, of Men better and more esteemed than themselves: In a Word, Would such but mortifie their Vanity, by observing the Worthlessness, the Instability, of Popular Applause and Publick Respects, which they are so prone to be blown up, and turned giddy with. The Passage before us demonstrates, how false a Confidence we place in these Advantages; what very Reeds the Affections of the People are; and how they bend to every Wind, of Faction, and Interest, and malicious Insinuation, even when most Zealous, even when most Sincere. For what Security can any one have, that these Affections shall be constant to him, when this most Innocent, most Innooffensive Person; This best Benefactor to Mankind, whom his most inveterate Enemies could not convince of any Sin, did yet, after so many Miracles of Mercy, find these deserved *Hosanna's* changed, in five Days time, into those causeless, those importunate Clamours, *Crucifie him, Crucifie him, Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas?*

Luke xxiii.
18, 21.

3. The different Behaviour of the Rulers, from that of the Common People, upon this Occasion, should be a Warning to Us, that we suffer not any Person, or private Respects, to bias us in Matters of Religion. For the Resentments, so directly contrary, of the Miracle, by which *Lazarus* was raised from the Dead, shew what unequal Judges of Men and Things Prejudice and Interest are; And, that the Success of the best Doctrine, and most sufficient Evidence, will turn at last upon the Dispo-

Disposition of the Persons, to whom they are proposed. Thus it must needs be in the Nature of the Thing. Moral Persuasions cannot act mechanically and necessarily; but must, in order to their Efficacy, pre-suppose a Mind honest and free, willing to hearken and submit to Reason. And thus it is also in the Case of Christianity in particular. There is no one point of Faith and Practice, but it may be, and hath been, abundantly vindicated, from all the Exceptions that lie against it. The chief Cause, why Truth is not universally received, is, that all Men do not come to the Consideration of it, with a Spirit of Meekness, and Love of the Truth. And Error and Vice prevail, not from any Substance and Solidity of their own, so much as from that dead weight of corrupt Inclinations, which Men bring along with them, and cast into the Scale. The distant Opinions about the same Things proceed, from Men, not seeing with the same Eyes, and under the same Prospects. Some judge impartially, Others are bribed and blinded. And, though no Man is wittingly deceived; yet many contribute to their own Deceit, by using false Measures, which Custom, or Advantage, or some other personal Respect, imposes upon them for just and true. St. James hath therefore prescribed the right Method, first to

Jam. i. 21. *put away all Filthiness and Superfluity of Naughtiness, and then to receive the ingrafted Word, which (so, and only so) is able to save our Souls.* But,

4. The Impressions, I am principally desirous to leave upon my Reader, are such, as regard the Future Coming of our Lord, prefigured by that of this Day's Gospel. And in this Type, We all shall find Subject for our Imitation. These Multitudes came out to meet Jesus riding on an Ass; but the same Jesus shall one Day

Psal. xviii. 68. *make the Clouds his Chariot, and ride upon the Heavens, as it were upon an Horse.*

They sang the Praises of the Son of David, to a City who

who would not receive him as such ; but He, who hath already demonstrated himself to be that promised *Son of David*, shall then come to convince the unbelieving World, that he is the very *Son of God*. And We, like Them, should all go forth to meet him. Like Them, I say, with the Sincerity of Disciples, with the Innocence of Children. Let Us, like Them, cut down the *Branches* from our Trees, those Worldly Vanities and Carnal Affections ; which, like luxuriant Boughs, must be lopp'd off, and cast under the Feet of this Heavenly King, by stooping to his Holy Discipline. Let Us too *spread* our Hearts, as *They their Garments* ; that every Faculty, and every Thought, may be subject to his Dominion ; and labour to adorn the Body of this Mystical Head, the Church and Doctrine of Christ. So shall this Cloathing of Flesh, which must shortly be put off, be resumed again with Joy ; And, from a *Vessel of Honour and Sanctification here*, become his Attendant and Companion *into the Heavenly Jerusalem*. So shall we be qualified to bear our part, in the most exalted Sense of these Hymns and Acclamations ; and, in that Day of Salvation, shout forth with Gladness and Thanksgiving unspeakable, *Blessed be the King that cometh in the Name of the Lord*. Yea, Blessed be he that cometh, Not to suffer, but to reign ; not to redeem, but to recompense. *Hosanna* to the Meek Son of *David* ! *Hosanna* to the Glorious Majesty of the Son of God ! Blessed be the Kingdom, which is come to rule our Hearts by Grace ! Blessed be the Kingdom, that cometh to reward our Obedience with Glory. *Blessed be our Peace, who died unto Sin once ! Blessed be our Righteousness, who liveth for ever unto God. Hosanna* to Him, who came to *Jerusalem*, to be judged in great Humility ! *Hosanna* to Him, who cometh with terrible Pomp to judge both the Quick and the Dead. *Hosanna in the Highest*.

Eph. ii. 14.

Rom. vi. 10.

Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

1 Cor. i. 30.

The Second Sunday in Advent.

The COLLECT.

Rom. xv. 4.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by Patience and Comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

The EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

Rom. xv. 4.

4. The History and Prophecies of the Old Testament are written for the Benefit of us, who live under the New.

4. **W**hatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our Learning: that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

That, by observing what happened to pious Persons heretofore, and to others since, of whom they are Types, we might be excited to the like Virtue and Constancy, by the supporting Expectation of the like Rewards for our Sufferings.

5. And may the same God, who sustained Them with his holy Comforts, endue Us with a Spirit of Meekness and Forbearance, Us both a Command and a

5. Now the God of Patience and Consolation grant you to be like minded one towards another according to Christ Jesus.

of which Christ Jesus, above all others, hath left a Pattern.

6. That we may preserve a true Christian Communion in Heart and Af-

6. That ye may with one mind, and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

* *Grot. in locum.* fection, as well as in Voice and * outward Form; and perfectly agree in joint Endeavours to promote the Honour of that God, who under the Gospel, is distinguished by that peculiar Title, *The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

7. And great Reason there is, why Jew and Gentile Converts should

7. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

bear with each Other, and not break Communion, for Infirmities, and different Notions in Matters of less Concern; when it is considered, how kind and condescending Christ himself hath been to both those sorts of Men.

8. If the Gentiles be apt to despise the Jews, let them remember, that This People only had

8. Now I say, that Christ Jesus was a minister of the Circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the Promises made unto the Fathers.

the Privilege of Christ's Presence and personal Ministry among them: and that, by Virtue of solemn Promises, by which God had bound himself to their

their Ancestors, whom he chose, out of all the Kindreds of the Earth, to make them his own Peculiar.

9. *And, that the Gentiles might glorifie God for his Mercy, as it is written, For this cause will I confesse to thee among the Gentiles, and unto thy Name.*

10. *And again he saith, Rejoice ye Gentiles with his people.*

thought them worth taking in, even without any previous Engagement to do so. And of this many expresse Predictions are extant in the Jewish Prophets.

11. *And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles, and laud him, all ye People.*

to join in Praise for spiritual Mercies, (as *David* does) it is implied, that they should partake in the Blessings they are to praise God for. And this is the Strain, in which not only *David* (who speaks in the Person of Christ) but *Moses* long before, accosted the Heathen Nations in.

12. *And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him shall the Gentiles trust.*

ple shall flock, and with great Security commit themselves to his Government and Protection. Since therefore Both are received, Both should respect and receive one another into Communion and Friendship, and unite in the same common Design, of promoting Religion; and prosecuting the same Hope.

13. *Now the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

ferences, and inspire that Charity and mutual Forbearance, which alone can justify this Hope. For as this can be wrought in our Hearts only by God's own Spirit, so the Comforts of it belong to, and are enjoyed by none, who are not of a peaceable and meek Disposition.

9. Again, if the Jews be tempted to scorn the Gentiles, let them reflect, that, though these were not under the same formal Covenant, yet God

11. For when these join the Gentiles with Jews, or call upon the Gentiles

12. And *Isaias* describes the *Messiah*, as an universal Monarch, to whose victorious Standard all Peo-

13. And may God, the Giver of this Hope, grant you all to agree in the true Faith, compose your Dif-

COMMENT.

IN order to make a due Improvement of this Scripture, Three Things, I conceive, are necessary.

I. *First, To explain the immediate Occasion of it.*

II. *Secondly, To consider the Design and Importance of the Apostle's Argument, with regard to that particular Occasion.* And then,

III. *Thirdly, To bring the Matter home by such Inferences, as may render it of use to Our selves, and to all Christians in general.*

I. I be-

I. I begin with the *Immediate Occasion*, upon which this Portion of Scripture was at first delivered. For a right understanding whereof, we must observe, that the Church of *Rome* was made up of mixt Converts, Some of whom came over to the Christian Faith from Jewish, and Others from Heathen, Principles. The Former continued to observe, and pay great Veneration to, the Ceremonial Law of *Moses*. Not having yet vanquished the Prejudice of Education and Custom, nor attained to a perfect understanding of that Liberty, which the Gospel allows to every Christian with respect to Matters in their own Nature Indifferent. And those Persons, upon the Account of that Defect in their Judgment, are called

Weak in the Faith. The Others, who had juster Apprehensions of this Point, made no difference in *Meats*, or *Days*, or any such Levitical Ordinances; but acted with all the Freedom becoming Men, who were duly sensible, that the New Covenant had set them at large from the Restraint of any such Distinctions. And These, because rightly informed, and thoroughly satisfied in their own Breasts, that what they did the

Gospel would bear them out in, are term'd the *Strong*. Now, had each of these Sorts contented themselves, with governing their own Behaviour by their own Principles, without censuring and condemning those of a contrary Principle; they might still have thought and acted differently, and yet no harm had been done. But that which divided the Church, dishonoured God, and weakned the common Cause, was, that the *Strong* reproached the *Weak*, as Superstitious and Silly: And the *Weak* abhorred the *Strong*, as Irreligious and Profane. To heal this Breach effectually, the Apostle had plied both Parties with great variety of Arguments, in the XIVth Chapter; And here in the XVth, he addresses to Them of sounder Judgment particularly, exhorting those to Compassion for their Brethren

thens honest, though mistaken Zeal ; and to such Allowances for their Infirmities, as might preserve an Unity in Affection, where that in Opinion could not be attained to.

The last and highest Motive reserved for this Purpose, is taken from the Example of our Saviour Christ, Who, for our Benefit, submitted to many things harsh and very grievous to him. In Proof of this he urges a Passage out of the Psalms, wherein *David* complains, that the hard things said and done against God, were levell'd at, and endured by, Him. But if this were true of *David*, in his own Person, and his private Capacity ; it was much more so of him, in his Prophetical and Typical Capacity : For Christ, whose Person *David* thus sustained, did not only suffer the Reproaches of God's Enemies, but suffered for them too, and bore the Punishment and the Malice of them both. And, * to justify the Application of this Text to our Lord, the

* Grot. in loc.

Apostle begins the Epistle for this Day, with a Reflection of general use for rightly understanding and improving by the Writings of the Old Testa-

Ver. 4.

ment. *Whatsoever things*, &c. Intimating that the Relations of Good Mens Sufferings, and other Matters contained there, were not barely an Historical Account of Actions and Events already pass'd, but Shadows and Significations of Others yet to come. And the Use we ought to make of them is, from the Examples of those Holy Persons, but especially of *Jesus*, the most absolute and perfect of all Examples, to support our Spirit, and confirm our Resolution, with the Prospect of a like glorious Recompence, for any Inconvenience we shall submit to, for the sake of God's Honour, and the Service of our Brethren. Thus much, I think, may suffice to explain the immediate Occasion of this Scripture ; and shall therefore proceed now to the

II. *Second Thing propounded, The Design and Importance of the Apostle's Argument, with regard to the Case of the Persons then considered in it.*

The Design he drives at we have in that Prayer, that
Ver. 5. God would bring those Christians of differing Judgments, to be like minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus; that is, to such a due Temper, such mutual Kindness, such charitable Behaviour, that the Observers of those Legal Ordinances might no longer *despise* them, who were well assured they were under no Obligation to continue the Observance of them: And that They, who in this Persuasion observed them not, might leave off their hard Censures of Those, who, for want of better Information, thought themselves still bound by them. That so by such profitable Condescensions on either side, as Christ hath left both a Precept, and Pattern for, they would lay down all Party-quarrels, and heartily join in Communion together. And, for apprehending the Force and Reasonableness of this Advice, we shall do well to attend to Two things.

1. The Strength of that Motive, whereby he expressly urges them to it, *The Example of our Saviour Christ.*

2. The excellent Effects like to be produced by it. And these again are Two. (1.) The Glory accruing to God by this Charity and mutual Forbearance, *That ye*

Ver. 6. *may glorifie God, even the Father of our*
Ver. 7. *Lord Jesus Christ. And again, Receive*

ye one another, as Christ also received Us,
to the Glory of God. (2.) The publick Good of the Church. For thus much is hinted in that concluding

Prayer, where he begs of God *to fill them*
Ver. 13. *with all Joy and Peace in believing, that*
they might abound in hope, through the Power of the Ho-
ly Ghost.

I. *First* then, For the Motive whereby this Agreement is urged, *The Example of Christ*. The Propriety whereof will more fully appear, if we regard the Persons between whom this Controversy lay; and especially, that sort of them, to whom the Apostle more particularly addresses himself, in this part of his Discourse now under Consideration.

The Parties concerned were Jewish and Gentile Converts, or, according to St. Paul's Style elsewhere, *such as lived after the manner of the Jews, and such as lived as do the Gentiles*. Which Gal. ii. 14. last Distinction I the rather mention; because, though it be not very probable, that any Gentile Converts thought themselves in Bondage to the Ceremonial Law of *Moses*; yet it is by no means manifest, that none at all among the Jewish Converts were convinced of their Release from that Bondage. It is enough for the Apostle's purpose, that this Prejudice was general, though not universal. And the Substance of his Reasoning may be comprised in this. Christ did not reject either Jew or Gentile, but united both to himself, by admitting them as Members into the same Mystical Body: and the Honour of God was greatly illustrated by this kind Condescension. The Persons therefore thus highly favoured, thus closely incorporated, could not do better, than to remember, and to copy after, the Goodness of their common Saviour and Head. It would ill become Them to disdain or cast out those from their Charity, whom Christ did not shut out from his Mercy. Especially, since this whole Matter was so ordered, that each of these had Privileges peculiar to themselves; which ought in reason to set the One sort above the Other's Contempt. The Jew cannot be thought despicable, since Christ himself confined the Honour of his Presence, and the Exercise of his Prophetick Office upon Earth, to this People and Persuasion only: Since God looked upon them as his Own, by a Title distinct from the rest of

Mankind; Since he gave them the Option as it were, and engaged, that to These first Salvation should be sent. The Gentiles, 'tis confess'd, had no such Claims or Covenants to produce; But yet so tender regard had God for Them too, as to make them Partners in the Gospel-Grace. And the less Ground these had to expect it, the more surprisingly great was the Kindness that bestowed it. Thus was God glorified in respect of Both. His

Ver. 8.

Justice and *Truth* were conspicuous in receiving the Jews according to Promise;

Ver. 9.

and his *Mercy* and Goodness were eminently so, in receiving the Gentiles without

the like Promise. Both then were taken in, and if not both upon an equal Foot, yet what was done freely is as evident a Demonstration of Love, as what was done to make good an Antecedent Engagement. Though in very Deed, if we drive the Point a little higher, Both owe their Acceptance to God's Grace entirely: for even the binding himself by Promise was God's own free Act. And therefore the Reason holds good, that Persons thus equalled, in the Favour of God, and the Benefits of the Christian Dispensation, should by no means despise or cast off one another; but imitate an Example, to which all their own Happiness is owing; by mutual Compassion. and a very tender regard for each other's spiritual Advantage, and that Glory of God, which Both sorts profess to make their common End, though they are not agreed, by what Methods it is best advanced. And therefore Each endeavoured it in his own way, and took such measures, as himself judged most expedient.

This Reasoning from the Example of our Blessed Saviour receives yet greater Enforcement, if we attend to the Persons, before whom this Model is set, to square their own Actions by. Now they are the

Ver. 1, 2.

Strong Men, such as were rightly apprised of their Christian Liberty, and perfectly satisfied in the Use of it. Admitting then their Opinion of the Mat-
ters

ters in dispute to be most just, and the Aspersions cast upon their Conduct hard and undeserved; the Effect of Ignorance, nay, of inveterate Prejudice; yet ought not the Soundness of their own Judgment, or the ill Treatment they met with from their *Weaker* Brethren, either to make the Breach wider, or so much as to keep it open between them. For, What Comparison can be made between the Attainments of even the Strongest Christians above the *Weakest*, and the Perfections of Christ above the very *Strongest*? What account can be made of the bitterness, the most unjust *Reproaches*, between One Man and Another, by any who reflects at all upon that perpetual, that virulent *Contradiction* of Sinners, which the Holy Jesus *endured against himself*? If then the Misery, the wretched Darkness, the grievous, the numberless Provocations of Jews and Gentiles Both, did not so alienate His Affections from Either, but that he condescended in marvellous Compassion to receive Both into Grace: shall any of the Persons so undeservedly received disdain and damn one the other, for disagreeing about Matters in their own Nature *indifferent*? Shall They be more severe, more implacable, for mere Defects, and innocent Mistakes, to Men of the same Frame, and upon a level with themselves; than their God and Saviour hath shewed himself, for wilful and deliberate Offences, to which a simple Error in Judgment bears no manner of Proportion? If some Dissenting Persons had by an inconsiderate Zeal been transported, beyond the Bounds of Charity and Moderation, yet the Honesty of their Intentions might be allowed in abatement for their Faults. Their Ignorance should rather move Pity than Anger, and their very worst Indiscretions find an easy Pardon, with Them, who had already been pardoned many more, and much greater Follies. The use of better Knowledge is not to despise and condemn, but in *Meekness to instruct* and edify, those who for want of it *oppose themselves*. When the Head vouch-

2 Tim. ii. 25.

safes to cherish the Inferior Members, those Members should not do despite to, and bear hard upon, one another. And since He, who is *Strength* in the Abstract, did not think it beneath him to relieve and graciously accept our Weaknesses; They, whose very best Strength is but *Weakness*, must not be so exalted with a fond Conceit of This, as not to bear with the Infirmities of Men, in some little Measure weaker than themselves, In short, the whole Scheme of our Redemption, and every Action of the Blessed Jesus, is an Admonition to all His Disciples, that they ought greatly to humble and deny themselves, in Tenderness to others. And therefore no Christian answers his Character, who so abounds in his own Sense, as not, upon some Occasions, to depart from his Right, and make Allowances for the Failings and Misapprehensions of his Fellow-Christians. So far, I mean, as this may conduce to the preserving of Charity, to the advantage of Religion in common, to the Peace and Benefit of differing Parties, and to the Honour of Almighty God: All which may be much illustrated and advanced by mutual Condescensions. And thus I am brought to the Other Branch of the Apostle's Argument;

2. The excellent Effects of such Forbearance. Now they are Two: *The Glory of God, and the Benefit of the Church.*

The Former is recommended to us in those Passages,

Ver. 6. That ye may with one mind, and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And again, *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received Us, to the Glory of God.* The Glory of God is so

exquisite in it self, and so essential to Him, that it is not in the Power of any Creature, strictly speaking, to add to, or take away from it. All therefore, which the Scripture intends by those Expressions of *glorifying, or doing things to the Glory of God*, is only setting forth the

the Excellence of that Glory, which in reality is Infinite, and always the same. And this is done, when Matters are so ordered, as both to testify in our own Minds, and to beget in other People, a due Reverence and Admiration of the Divine Majesty and Perfections. When we win Men over to, and make them in Love with, Religion ; the Belief of those Truths which God hath revealed, and the Practice of those Good Works, by which he delights to be served. And, in regard the Christian Institution is that reasonable, that only acceptable, Service at present required from Us ; hence probably, that Title is added here, *The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. This being a Stile purely Evangelical ; and intimating, that we do then most effectually contribute to God's Glory, when we promote the Growth and general Esteem, and convince the world of the Power, and the mighty Advantages of the Christian Religion.

Now how greatly Concord and Charity, Compassion and mutual Forbearance, Unity in Opinion and Worship, and Consent in Action, where these can be had ; and where they cannot, Condescension, and Patience, and Peace, denying our selves, and pleasing and seeking the Good of our Brethren : How much These Qualities, I say, make for the Credit of any Profession, and the engaging others to come into it, is too manifest to need a Proof. They are Effects so sensible, so perfectly agreeable to the Temper and Desires of every good Man ; so suited to the Happiness and Ease of private Persons and publick Societies, that all sorts of Men presently feel their kindly Influence and general Benefit. They must needs do so ; For, since all the Misery and Mischief, and Division in the World, proceed from Partiality, and a corrupt Principle of *Self-seeking* ; It follows, that no Doctrine can so effectually recommend it self to the Affections of considering Persons, as, by giving Demonstration of its Efficacy, in plucking up this Root of Bitterness, and disposing Men to a meek and quiet Spirit, to Humility

mility and Patience, to all equitable Allowances, and a generous Zeal for the Good of others, even at the Expence of some Trouble to Themselves. And herein is the Wisdom and Goodness of God truly admirable, that he hath made our Duty and our Happiness, his own Glory and the Good of Mankind so inseparable, that the same Methods tend to promote Both. These two, to speak the Truth, are in effect but one and the same thing, expressed by different Names, and considered under different Respects. So natural and just is the Apostle's reasoning here, which proceeds, in the next place, to urge these Virtues upon the *Romans*, from that other Topick intimated in his Prayer, which concludes the Epistle for the Day. And that is,

2. *The Benefit of the Church.* Of which we have Two

Ver. 13.

Instances mentioned, *Being filled with all*

Joy and Peace in believing; and abounding in hope through the Power of the Holy Ghost. As to the Former, we may observe God invoked before, as *The God of Patience and Consolation.* Not meerly, I suppose, by reason of the things being mentioned just before, but to accommodate the Title to the Subject-matter of the Request introduced by it. And here again the

Compare Ver.

5. & 13.

Apostle invokes the *God of Hope*, to fill his Servants with *Joy, and Peace, and Hope.* By joining all which together he

hints to us this most certain Truth, that, where Patience and Peace are, there will not fail to be Comfort and Joy: And that, as these produce each other, so they cannot subsist, or be reasonably hoped for, without each other.

Psal. cxxxiii.

Ver. 2, 3.

Behold, says David, how good and joyful a thing it is, Brethren to dwell together in Unity: Profitable and Good, as the *Dew*

upon the Hills, that waters and refreshes and crowns them with Plenty. Pleasant and joyful, as precious Ointment, whose Odours cheer the Senses, and perfume the Air with their Fragrancy. And thus it is, as in other

Matters,

Matters, so in none more, than in those of Religion. When Men glorify God with one Mind and one Mouth, and keep Communion, notwithstanding some Difference of Judgment; their Devotions are like a melodious Consort, ravishing Sweet; where every Voice, and every Instrument is tuned to the same Key; And, though the Parts are different, yet all strike into one perfect Harmony. But the Disagreement of Opinions, seconded by that of Affection, is like a jarring Instrument, or Voice out of Tune; which breaks the Concord quite, grates the Ear with its Harshness, and disturbs the whole Composition. This Inconvenience the pious Wisdom of the Church so far provides against, as to put the same Forms of Publick Prayer into the Mouths of all her Children. (Such Forms *Grotius* here seems to think this Passage might allude to.) But if we do not pray and praise God *with one Mind*, as well as *one Mouth*; much of the Grace, of the Cheerfulness, nay and of the Force too is lost, which such Devotions would have, by being entirely united, and of a piece throughout. And so it is in other Cases. There must be *Peace in believing*, or there can be no true *Joy*. There must be *Patience* and Allowances for Ignorance and Infirmities, in Matters of less Moment; Charitable Constructions of Their Behaviour, who differ from us in their Notions of Things, equivalent to the *Meats* and *Days* among these *Roman* Converts, or there can be no *Peace*. In the Substantial parts of Religion these *Romans* were perfectly agreed: And it was not their Differing in the Circumstances, but their despising and condemning one another for such Difference, that made the Breach upon true Christian Unity. Now nothing of indifferent Temper can be of equal Importance with Charity. On the Former the Beauty and Decency of Religion may depend in some measure; But in the Latter its very Life and Being properly consists. It is not needful, perhaps not possible, that all Christians should agree in every Point: but in the main Substance of

of Religion they may, and must; for this only is *Peace in Believing*. And They, who are thus far of a Mind, must not break Communion upon every slight Pretence; Not for things of Importance so small, that the Disturbance of the Church's Peace cannot be compensated, by sticking pertinaciously to, or holding obstinately out against them. And, when Men have brought themselves to a due Temper in these Matters, all is safe and well; they may have both *Peace* and *Joy*. Nay, which is more, they may *abound in Hope through the Power of the Holy Ghost*: The last good Effect mentioned here, and that, wherein the Benefit of the Church is greatly concern'd.

For *Hope*, in this Place, will bear a very large Interpretation. *Hope*, that the Persons, thus Charitable to their Weaker Brethren, will not fail of a Reward, proportionable to that of Christ, and other Holy Patterns, whose Condescensions they are thus careful to Copy after. *Hope*, that the *Weak* may be gained by such Forbearance and Tenderneſs in the *Strong*, whom Rigour, and Stiffneſs, and Contempt, are but like to exasperate, and harden the more in their Errors. *Hope*, that the substantial parts may be better established, and all Believers improve in Faith and a good Life; when all lend their helping Hand to Truth and Virtue, without suffering their different Apprehensions, what may be fittest for the *Ornament*, to divide their Endeavours for the *Strength* and *Security*, of this *Spiritual House*. *Hope*, that this Building may be still enlarged, and take in those, who as yet are Strangers and Enemies to Christ; when they observe, how powerful such Religion is, to beat down Pride and Envy, and every narrow selfish Passion, and to inspire Men with a Godly Zeal, of not

Ver. 2.

pleasing themselves, but their Neighbours for their good to Edification. *Hope*, lastly, That they who maintain this Concord upon Earth, shall not fail to be joined hereafter in that perfect Love, that unanimous giving Glory to God, which is the constant

Employ-

Employment, the unspeakable Bliss of Blessed Spirits in Heaven. A Bliss, of which this Unity in the present Life, is not only an Emblem, but a preparatory and indispensable Condition. And this *Hope* is by the Apostle ascribed to the *Power of the Holy Ghost*, and begged of God as his peculiar Gift; because the Crosses and Temptations the Provocations and Censures, the Injuries and Sufferings, the Delay of God's most precious Promises, the Difficulties we meet with in doing our Duty, the froward Dispositions and different Spirits of those we converse with, are an Over-Match for corrupt Nature. A Nature, which cannot bear its own Burden, much less that of other People, without the Assistance of a Supernatural and Divine Power.

III. I shall now, in the *Last* Place, close this Discourse with some practical Inferences, which may bring *St. Paul's* Argument nearer Home, and render it of use to Us, and to all Christians in general. As,

First, The Ends, for which *St. Paul* says the Scriptures were designed, are an excellent Direction, how to judge of our Improvement by Reading and Hearing the Word of God. It were heartily to be wished, that the gross Neglect of conversing with these Sacred Oracles were not so Scandalous, so Ungrateful, as must needs one Day rise up in Judgment against the generality of Christians, and condemn them. But it is greatly to be feared withal, that Matters will not be found much better, with many who do read, and attend to, and spend much of their Time and Pains upon, the Scriptures, yet all this very wrong, and to little or no true Effect. Entering into the Niceties of Argument and Expression, settling dark Points of History, explaining difficult Texts, and reconciling seeming Contradictions; These are too often propounded, as the Chief End of such Studies. And These, it must be granted, have their Degree, not only of Usefulness, but even of Necessity. Without such Labours,

bours, we cannot make a full Discovery of the Treasures hidden there. But even the most perfect Discovery does not answer the End of imparting those Treasures. For the subtlest Critick stops short, if he content himself with that Excellence, and do not proceed to the making a good Christian. Would a Man demonstrate, that he hath profited by the Scriptures? *St. Paul* tells him, the Proofs to be produced for it are *Patience*, and *Comfort*, and *Hope*. Hath he learnt Meekness and Moderation to them who differ from him? Does he see the Ignorance and Infirmities of *Weaker* Christians with Temper and Compassion? and, instead of censuring and despising, labour to inform them better, and gain upon their Affections, by Methods of Gentleness, and all becoming Condescensions? Can he bear the Reproaches of them who are in the wrong, when he knows himself in the right? Can he put up Injuries for God's Sake, and quietly submit to Affliction, when Providence lays it upon him? Does he support himself in Hardships and Temptations, under Calumny and causeless Contradiction, by the Example of a suffering Saviour, and those other bright Patterns of Meekness and Perseverance, whose Trials and Praises are recorded in those Books? Does he labour diligently for Peace and Order, Charity and Godly Unity? This if he does, he is instructed, and mighty in the Scriptures indeed. But till the Virtues, commemorated and commanded there, are copyed out into his

I Cor. xiii. 2.

viii. 2.

Disposition and Practice, *Though he understand all Mysteries and all Knowledge*, yet this Apostle tells him roundly, that all this while, he is *nothing*, and *knows nothing*, as he ought to know.

2. Secondly, When the *Glory of God*, and the *Benefit of Christians in Common* are mentioned, as the Ends and Excellent Effects of Unity; This shews us the Errors of those Men, who foment Divisions, and kindle Party-Quarrels, upon Pretence of God's Honour, and the Advantage

vantage of Religion. Even Peace, it is true, may be purchased too dear; and therefore we must be sure, that it be *Peace in Believing*. But when the Fundamentals of Religion are well secured, Then to be over-tenacious in Matters of less Moment, is not to serve the Cause of God and Truth, but our own Passions, and Prejudices, and private Interests. The Spiritual *Jerusalem* is never so strong, as when the Builders contrive to make it *a City at Unity within it self*. And we can never *please our selves* too little, nor our less judicious *Neighbours* too much, provided we Ver. 2. make the Apostle's Rule the End and Measure of our Condescensions: Which is, to stick at nothing that may be for *their Good to Edification*. But, for preventing any Misconstruction, which either Unwary or Designing Men may put upon this Inference, I must earnestly intreat my Reader to consider,

3. *Thirdly*, That the Matter in dispute between these *Jew* and *Gentile* Converts was perfectly indifferent. My Meaning is, That it was so, not only in its own Nature, as not essential to Religion; but it was so in point of Use and Practice; by Reason no Authority had interposed, so as positively to command or forbid the doing it. And therefore all required in this Case was, that every Man should be satisfied in his own Conduct, and not censure or despise Them, who thought and acted otherwise. Both sorts are supposed sincere in their way, and both accepted by God for that Sincerity; Therefore neither of them Chap. xiv. 3, 4, 5, 6. obnoxious to the Contempt or Condemnation of Men. This was the State of their Case at that time. But, what Advantage can fairly be drawn from hence, for holding out, against the Commands of our Superiours in Matters of like Temper now, or to the Prejudice of that wholesome Discipline, which, for the sake of Order and Edification, prescribes or limits the Use of Things, in themselves Indifferent; is not easy to comprehend. When

Human

Human Power is exercised in these, it acts in its proper Sphere. These are indeed its strict and only Province. That which is Good in its own Nature is already enjoined to its Hand, and all that our Governors can do, is only to confirm and give it a fresh Sanction. That which is Evil in it self no Human Power can oblige Men to. And, if *Indifferent* Things be thus restrained, as to the Use of them; Be it in what Case it will, they are not thereby changed, as to their Nature. The Relation they bear to Religion does not make them cease to be such. For then they could not be imposed, or removed, at the Pleasure of our Governors. And consequently, remaining still *Indifferent*, they cannot cease to be a proper Subject, for Human Prudence and Authority to Exercise it self in. But tho' the Things themselves are still *Indifferent*; Yet Peace and Charity, Unity and Obedience, are not, cannot be so. So wide a Distance is there between a Case, where there was no antecedent Command, but every Man was left at large to govern himself by his own Judgment: And One, wherein Publick Authority hath given Rule to the Practice of Private Persons, and determined the Use of that, which is judged most conducive to the Edification of the whole Community under its Care.

4. *Fourthly*, It follows from this Discourse of the Apostle, that there may be a true Christian Unity preserved, among those, who are far from being agreed in every Particular relating to Religion. *Both He that did,*
and He that did not eat, did it unto the
Lord. That is, Each of them went upon a Principle of Conscience. The Jewish Party were certainly in the wrong: But their Error was tolerable. The only thing that made it otherwise, was their Uncharitableness attending that Error. And hence it is, that the Method taken by St. *Paul* for bringing these Parties to a good Understanding, is not to argue them all into one Opinion; but, waving the Merits of the point
in

in Controversy, to forbid Uncharitableness to those of the contrary opinion. And the Reason, why no more than this was necessary, is contained in these Words, *The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God and approved of Men.* These were not of the Substance of Religion; and therefore Christian Communion might and ought to be kept up, notwithstanding any Differences, where the Foundations are not struck at. These Men were free, nay they would do well to persuade and gain upon one another, by calm and fair arguing, by all gentle and amicable Methods: But none of them was allowed to censure and to condemn those, who understood less than themselves. And This was sufficient to preserve Unity of Affection, as That again is sufficient for the Purposes of God's Glory, and the Common Good; and as much, as the State of the Church, in the present World, stands in need of.

5. *Lastly*, We shall do well very diligently to observe the means prescribed here, for bringing us all to this Temper. And they are such as follow. Reflecting with all due Humility, upon the infinitely greater Condescensions of God and Christ towards our selves: Who are the very Best of us infinitely more unworthy Their Compassion, than the weakest or Worst of our Brethren can possibly be of Ours. Attending impartially, and indeed especially, to the good and commendable Qualities of Them that differ from us, and not only to their Errors and their Faults. For as it will ill become Them to shew Rigour in less Matters, whose only Hope is owing to Mercy in Greater; so the general Cause of Censure and Contempt, is the over-rating our own Qualifications and Advantages, and over-looking those of our Brethren: Seeing nothing in our selves, or those of our own side, but what magnifies

magnifies them in our Esteem ; and nothing in those of a different Judgment, but what represents them little and despicable in our Eyes. Bigotry, and Pride, and Self-love, are the cursed Fomenters of Uncharitableness and Faction ; As Humility, Candor, and Meekness, Largeness of Heart, and a Zeal for the Good of Christians in general, are the sure Establishers of Temper, and Peace, and Love. With these therefore if we thoroughly possess our Souls, *The God of Hope will fill us with all Joy and Peace in believing, and we shall abound in Hope through the Power of the Holy Ghost.*

See Matt. xxiv. 29, &c.

PARAPHRASE.

25. When Christ shall come to execute Judgment, there shall be many dreadful Signs of his Approach, prodigious Darkeness and frightful Sightings in the Heavens, Calamities, and Confusion over all the Earth, horrible Tempests at Sea.

26. Dread and Despair of wicked Men, whose guilty Hearts shall then misgive them, when they see these Terrors take hold of,

27. And then shall they behold the Son of Man appear as a visible Judge, attended with a vast Retinue of Angels, and all the Demonstrations of Omnipotence and Majesty Divine.

28. But let not the Righteous be daunted at this general Consternation ; for to such it shall be a Day of Joy, of speedy and compleat Deliverance from all their Misery and Trouble.

29. And be assured that what I foretel is most true.

THE GOSPEL.

S. Luke xxi. 25.

25. **A**ND there shall be signs in the Sun, and in the Moon, and in the Stars, and upon the Earth distress of Nations with perplexity, the Sea and the Waves roaring.

26. Mens Hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the Earth. For the Powers of Heaven shall be shaken.

27. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a Cloud, with Power and great Glory.

28. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your Heads, for your Redemption draweth nigh.

29. And he spake to them a Parable, Behold the Fig-tree, and all the Trees.

30. When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves, that Summer is now nigh at hand,

31. So

31. *So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

these Signs are, that Christ will then quickly enter upon his Glorious Kingdom.

32. *Verily I say unto you, this Generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled.*

plished, as concerns the Destruction of the Jewish Polity: And the rest, which regards the Universal Judgment, is no less sure.

33. *Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

ed and immutable Things; yet are not even These so firm, as my Predictions of these Things. They shall then be changed and dissolved, but my Word shall not be changed, nor shall one Tittle I have now delivered, fail of its designed Event.

31. For the shooting of Leaves and Buds is not a surer Token of the warm Weather drawing on, than

32. Many Persons now alive shall see so much of these Prophecies accom-

33. For, though Heaven and Earth are looked upon as the most fixed

COMMENT.

IN this Scripture we have the Three following Particulars remarkable,

I. *The terrible Forerunners of the last Judgment, and how fit these Prognosticks are to warn us of its Approach.* Ver. 25, 26.

II. *The visible and majestick Appearance of our Judge.* Ver. 27.

III. *The different Resentments, with which Men shall entertain the Notice of his Coming, according to their different Circumstances and Expectations.* Ver. 26, 28.

I. I begin with the terrible Forerunners of this Judgment, and the Fitness of such Prognosticks to give us warning of our Lord's Approach. Of these we have a full and very dreadful Account, in the Writings both of the Prophets in the Old, and of the Apostles and Evangelists in the New, Testament. And by consulting the Marginal * References, the Reader may quickly satisfy himself, that no Circumstance of Horror shall then

* See Isai. xxiv, xxx, xxxiv, Dan. vii.

Joel ii.
Zeph. i.
Hagg. ii.
Malachi iv.
Matth. xxiv.
Mark xiii.
Heb. xii.
Revel. xx.

be wanting, which may render this Solemnity Awful and Great ; That no part of the Creation shall be exempted from contributing to its terrible Pomp ; But all Nature will feel the mighty Shock, and labour under an universal Convulsion. Above us, Fire, and Vapours, and Pillars of Smoak,

Thundrings and Lightnings, Gloominess and thick Darkness, Prodigies and fearful Sight ; The Light of the Sun put out, the Moon turned into Blood, the Stars starting from their Orbs, and the Heavens shrivelled up, like a flaming Scowl. Upon Earth, unnatural Treachery, shameless Vice, and all manner of Wickedness ; Wars and Commotions, Famines and Pestilences, Storms and Earthquakes. The Dreadfulness whereof, we are told, was but very feebly represented, by all those astonishing Manifestations of God's Presence in Mount *Sinai*, which

Heb. xii. 21.

even *Moses* was not able to sustain, without exceeding Fear and Trembling. And,

if the Terrors, thought necessary to beget a just Reverence for God's Law at its Promulgation, were so insupportable ; What, can we think, will the Day of Wrath and Vengeance implacable be, when the bold Contemners of his Law are to be made Examples to all Eternity ? And, since Fear is a Passion, to which even dissingenuous Tempers lie open, when gentler Motives can take no hold of them, the last of all Impressions that stubborn Sinners harden themselves against ; it was very proper for our Blessed Lord to give such Descriptions of his Coming to Judgment, that They, who will not

2 Cor. v. 14.
11.

be *constrained* by the Greatness of his *Love*, may at least be *persuaded* by the Knowledge of his Terrors. In short, that all of us

may live like Men, who have fair Warning, what hangs over their Heads, and what will one Day be most certainly executed, upon all Them, whom this Notice does not affright into better Manners.

But

But this is not all I mean, by the Fitness of these Terrors, to rouse Men into Thought, and put them upon considering whom they have to deal with. My Intention is to shew, that these Signs foregoing are demonstrative Evidences of a general Judgment to follow; and, upon that Account, excellently qualified, to awaken in our Minds an Expectation of the thing, which they undeniably prove. For, What are all those Plagues, and Prodigies, and outrageous Wickednesses, mentioned in the Scriptures here referred to, but so many Instruments of angry Justice, which God takes into his Hand, as he sees Occasion, for chastising the Disobedient, or cutting off the Incurable? In some of these he strikes immediately by himself: In Others he arms Natural Causes against them: and in a third sort he contrives it

so, that the Sins of one Man shall scourge those of another. But still by all these ways he executes Vengeance. And therefore

Chrys. Tom. 5.
Serm. 51. pag.
345. Ed. Eton.

the Inference common to them all, is, that God does observe, and think himself concerned to punish, wicked Actions, in some way, and at some time, or other. Now nothing can be more apparent, than that these Punishments do not make an exact distinction between Good and Evil Men, in the present State of Things: And therefore the Character of a Righteous and Holy Judge requires, that there should be a stricter Reckoning behind; for bringing those to Justice who escape here, and making those good Men amends hereafter, who endure Misery and Wrong here; notwithstanding they be at present involved in publick Calamities, together with the guilty Wretches, whose Sins had provoked them. Were no Wicked Men punished, no good Men afflicted or oppressed; Or did Every Man receive now in hand, in full Tale and exact Proportion to his Deserts; we could not then indeed urge the same Necessity of another Judgment in reserve. But as it is, the same Justice, which disposes God to punish Some, must needs

dispose him to punish All, that continue Refractory; that so he may, by setting the present Inequality of his Distributions right, reveal to the whole World the Righteousness of his Providence. While God Acts in the Quality of a Governor, (as in the present State of Affairs he does it,) it may suffice, that Virtue be encouraged, and Vice discountenanced, in general: But, since his Attributes require, he should act as a Judge too; they must imply Justice to every Cause that shall come in Issue before him, and a due Recompence nicely awarded, according to the Behaviour of each Man in particular. If all shall be Judged, all shall have Right done them. And therefore this, which is now done but in Part, shall be done one Day in its utmost Perfection. And its being done in part to Some, in the Sufferings of this World, is an Evidence, that God will find a time for doing Right in full to All, in the next World. For *the Judge of all the Earth* could not answer that Character, if so much as one single Inhabitant in it did not, at one time or other, *receive the things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

2 Cor. v. 10.

II. The Second Observation is, *The Visible and Majestick Appearance of this Judge.* Then *shall they see the Son of Man coming in a Cloud with Power and great Glory.* I need not spend time in proving, that this *Son of Man* is no other, than our Blessed Saviour. In this the Scriptures are most express, that the *very *Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews slew and hanged on a Tree, is ordained of God to be the Judge of Quick and Dead.* And the Result of this Argument is, That Christ shall execute Judgment in his *Human Nature*, and manifest himself to the Senses of the Parties concerned. That very Body, which was born and died, was buried and rose again the Third Day, which ascended into Heaven,

* Acts x. 36,
39, 41, 42.

Heaven, and is now seated at the Right Hand of God, shall locally descend, and sit upon a Throne; and, as his Divine Nature renders him an All-wise and Almighty, so shall his Appearance in our Human Form render him, at that Day, an Audible and a Visible Judge.

But, though he shall then appear in the same Nature, yet shall he not appear in the same Manner, as he did in the Days of his Flesh upon Earth. That Body formerly was exposed to Poverty and Weakness, to Reproach and Contempt, to Suffering and Pain, to Agonies and Death. These, like a thick Cloud, did eclipse and intercept the Divine Excellencies, which even then ** dwelt*

** Colos. ii. 9.*

in him fully and bodily. But, at his last Coming, that Veil shall be quite done away, and he will break forth in all the Lustre of an Incarnate God. His Body, like a Fountain of pure Light, out-shining the Sun in its Strength; the putting out of which, and the rest of the Heavenly Luminaries, ** Some have* understood, only of the transcendent Beauty of our Lord's Glorified Body, in Comparison whereof their Brightest Rays will be as Night and gross Darkness. Such a Glorious Change shall there be then, in the Person of our, once humbled and despised Jesus; So noble a Recompence shall his crucified Body receive, for all the Pain and Shame of the Cross; so exquisitely resplendent, so all-divine his Presence, infinitely above what any Resemblances, taken from Created Beings, can give us any tolerable Idea of, above what even inspired Writers could express, above what the largest finite Mind can stretch it self to conceive.

** Chryf. Theoph.*

The Splendor of this Coming will be yet more increased, by the Manner and Circumstances of it. By Christ's being seated upon a Cloud. Which we have reason to understand in the plain and literal Sense; ** Whether we reflect upon the Manner of God's usual Manifestation of his Presence in the Old Testament, Or*

** Exod. xvi. 10.
xix. 9. xxxiv. 5.
Levit. xvi. 2.
Numb. xv. 25.
1 Kings viii. 10.
Isai. vi. 1.*

2 Pet. i. 17.

† Acts i. 9, 10.

our Lord's Transfiguration in the *New*;
Or especially upon † the Testimony of
those Angels, that attended at his Ascension.

For, while the Apostles then present were *looking stedfastly toward Heaven, as he went up, behold Two Men stood by them in white Apparel; Which also said, ye Men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner, as ye have seen him go into Heaven.* All which, compared with our Lord's own Declarations* concerning his Second Coming, with what St. *Paul* † foretels, and †† St. *John* foresaw, are abundantly sufficient, to justify the generally received Opinion, that, as our Blessed Saviour went up into Heaven, so he shall return from thence to Judgment, upon a true and material Cloud.

* Mark xiii. 26.

xiv. 69.

† 1 Thef. iv. 17.

†† Rev. xiv.

14, 15, 16.

By the *Power* mentioned here, Some have understood

* Matth. xvi.

27.

xxiv. 31.

xxv. 31.

1 Thef. iv. 16.

2 Thef. i. 7, 8.

Matth. xiii.

41, 42.

† *Divinus*.

* those Heavenly Hosts, which, we are assured, shall then attend this Judge. But, besides this Military Sense of the † Word, I see no reason, why we should not extend it to all those Demonstrations of Majesty and Omnipotence, in which the Lord Christ shall then exert himself, Such as opening the Graves, assembling all Nations and Ages of Men, and compelling the most mighty, the most unwilling, to obey the unwelcome Summons. Doing himself Honour upon his Enemies, Rescuing and Rewarding his once despised and afflicted Servants, Unlocking the Mysteries of Providence, Exercising a Dominion uncontrollable, and displaying all the Attributes of the Godhead in exquisite Perfection. This shall be the Power, This the Glory, of that Great Day. And all this will be done, in a manner sensible and conspicuous to the whole World, that ungodly Wretches may look on Him, whom they have pierced with the blasphemous Impieties, and feel the

the Terrors, which they disdained to fear: That the Righteous may see and know whom they have trusted, and gaze with Joy and Transport inexpressible, on the Adorable Excellencies of Him, whom their Soul loved, even when distant and unseen. But I ought to remember, that these are Reflections, which more properly belong to my *Third Head*.

III. The different Repentments, with which the Approach of this Judgment will be entertained, according to Mens different Circumstances and Expectations from it. This is collected from the 26th and 28th Verses, each of which deserves our particular Notice.

St. *Luke* hath related our Lord's Prediction thus, that *there shall then be great Perplexity; that Mens Hearts shall fail them for Fear,* Ver. 26, 28.

and for looking after those things which are coming on the Earth. St. *Matthew*, that Matt. xxiv. 30.

then all the Tribes of the Earth shall mourn; and St. *John* is yet a little more particular, Rev. i. 7.

Behold, he cometh in the Clouds, and every Eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: And all Kindreds of the Earth shall wail because of him.

From which last Passage, and from the Command here to Some, that They should look up, and esteem those Warnings of our Lord's last Coming, a Matter of Joy and Happiness to them, We are sufficiently warranted to understand these Fears and Confusions, as Passions, not common to All promiscuously, but which belong and are peculiar to the Wicked; such as have reason to apprehend, that a Judgment will turn to their Disadvantage. Whereas the Righteous, on the other hand, are encouraged to wish and long for it, as that which brings on, and shall compleat, their

Redemption. And how just Ground there Ver. 28. is for these so contrary Repentments, a very few Words may suffice to illustrate.

1. For, *First*, Where shall we find Terms, to express the Tumults and Terrors of those Guilty Breasts, whom this Day overtakes (as we are told it shall
Ver. 34. do very many) *unawares*? Not *unawares* for want of sufficient Warning; Much might be then alledged in their Excuse: But *unawares*, for want of necessary Preparation, and attending to that Warning; which leaves no room for Apologies. Where shall the refractory *Jews*, Where the profess'd Infidels, Where the Enemies and Persecutors of Christ and his Members then appear? Where the treacherous Apostle, that betray'd and sold him; the Priests and Rulers, that set him at nought; the corrupt Judge, who against his own Conscience, condemn'd him; the malicious Rabble, that preferr'd a Robber and a Murderer before this Prince of Life and Glory; the hardned Wretches who insulted over his dying Agonies; the bribed Soldiers, and suborning Scribes, who by false Reports endeavoured to stifle and destroy the Credit of that Resurrection, which was the certain Pledge of this Final Judgment? What Shame and Confusion shall cover these Faces, when his Cross, that *Sign of the Son of Man*, heretofore a Mark of Ignominy and Pain, shall be set up as a Banner, and they, who fought manfully under this Standard, shall then be found the only happy Conquerors; With what Amazement will the Scoffers at Christ and his Gospel behold this once Mock-King and Universal Monarch, and the Thorns, with which he was crown'd in Malice and barbarous Sport, converted into Rays of Light and Glory; Attended *with thousand thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand Guards of Angels*
Dan. vii. 10. *standing before him*; each of which single hath hitherto been always too dazzling bright for Mortal Eyes to sustain; But why do I speak of these Men? Let us come nearer home. What Thoughts will then start up, and force themselves upon those obstinate, those dissolute Sons of Pleasure and Vanity, who now, in De-
fiance

fiance of their Baptifmal Vows, and better Education, make fuch a Jeft of a crucified God, and laugh at the Threatnings of his judging the World, as a Fable cunningly devised, to keep filly Souls in Awe: The Artifice of Politicians, The Talk of Church-Men, Contrived to enslave eafy credulous Creatures, that know no better, and to check the Sallies of brave and daring Wickednefs? Alas! Thefe Men fhall find, to their infinite Coft and Mifery, that their Preachers have not talked all this for their Trade, but fpoke the Words of Truth and Sobrnefs; And, if in any thing they fwerved from Truth, it hath been only in drawing thefe Horrors lefs than the Life, and not being capable of representing the Sinner's Danger, in its juft Proportions and blackeft Colours. What a difmal Change fhall then fucceed, when the insolent Mockers of God and his wife Dispensation, the Mimickry of prophane Wit, and vile Burlefques of Scripture, that filthy naufeous Froth, which is now thought to give fuch Relifh to Converfation, fhall fink into fruitlefs Confessions of Truth found too late; When every blafphemous Tongue fhall be ftruck dumb with Guilt and Defpair; and, in the place of loud Laughter at the moft Sacred Things, expofed by insolent Buffoonry, fhall fucceed Weeping and Wailing, Trembling Knees, Wringing Hands, and Gnafhing Teeth, thenceforth and for ever?

What Hills fhall the prophane Swearers call to fall upon them, What Mountains to cover them, when He, whofe Blood and Wounds have been fo wantonly tofs'd upon their Tongues, fhall come in flaming Fire, to revenge thefe rude Affronts of his moft Holy Name and Sufferings? Yes, impious Wretches, yes; The Plagues of God fhall confound you, and the Damnation you have fo often and fo loudly call'd for, will not always linger. Your Wifhes are heard, Hell hath opened her Mouth, and the Wrath of the Moft High comes rolling on a-main; It rushes on you like a mighty Torrent, and
finks

sinks you without Mercy into the Lake of Fire unquenchable; there to be ever tormented with that Devil and his Angels, to which your bitter Curses have so often, in dreadful Formality, delivered up your selves. Nay, where shall even those (in comparison Modest) Sinners appear, who in Words are content to own that Lord, whom in Works they too palpably deny; and discredit, at least, a Religion, which they do not professedly disclaim? The Intemperate and Lascivious, the Greedy Worldlings, or the Glittering Great Ones, that spend their Time and Wealth in Vice or Vanity; that give us the hearing, when we recommend Treasures in Heaven and spiritual Joys, but have their Heart still fastned upon the Dross of Riches and sensual Delights? And what will these things profit in the Day of Wrath? This Judge is not to be bribed with Money, nor awed with Pomp: They must then render a strict Account, not only how they got, but how they employed, their Possessions; and be pierced through and through, with this stabbing Reflection, that the Talents squandred away in stately Buildings, costly Apparel, numerous Equipage, and worldly Grandeur, are now become the Instruments of their Ruin; Those very Talents, which, if expended in cloathing the naked, and feeding the hungry Members of Christ, might have opened them a Passage into everlasting Habitations of Bliss and Glory. In vain will they then labour to divert the Thoughts of Judgment with Company and Diversion, or to drown them in Wine and Debauches; The Judge is at the Door, and will be seen, and heard, and felt, whether they will or no.

Think then, Sinner, think if thou darest, on this fatal Day; and know, there is not upon Earth a Creature so despicably cowardly and poor spirited, as He, whom Vice detains in wilful Ignorance, and bereaves of Courage to see and believe the Truth. And were not this better thought of, while thinking will do some good? Few Men are so desperately hardned and forsaken, as
not

not to be powerfully awakened, by the Bitterness of Affliction, the Languishings of Sickness, or the near Approach of Eternity, when a Death-bed sets them upon the Brink of it. But if God, in his just Judgment, suffer some to go out of the World, as insensible as they lived in it, yet even They shall find, at the Time spoken of here, that God is in very good earnest, and will repay Sinners to their Face. And, if the Apprehensions of this, even here, and at some distance, are so insupportable, as wounded Consciences daily find and feel, though the Gate of Mercy be not yet shut; What Rage, what Remorse, what Confusion and Despair, shall overwhelm those lost Wretches, who have out-stayed the Day of Grace, who have a Gaping Hell just before their Eyes, and no Prospect left, but that of fiery Indignation, already gone out to devour the Ungodly? How infinitely frightful must these things be, when actually present, which even afar off chill all our Blood and Spirits, and are not to be born? Frightful even now, above whatever the most melancholy Fears can paint. But, when all Hope, all Remedy is past, Jesus defend us! Who may then abide the ghastly Object! *O consider this then, consider it and be wise, ye that forget God; for otherwise, be assured, the time is coming, when he will pluck you away, and there shall be none to deliver you.* Psal. l. 22.

2. But, praised be the Divine Mercy for it, there is a bright side of this Judgment too. For, as for the Righteous and Faithful, it is not so with Them. Words are as much too weak, and the utmost Range of Imagination as far too short, for the Transports and Overflowing of these Mens Joy, as for the Anguish and Amazement of the Slothful and Wicked Servants. It is not indeed to be supposed, that the very best of Mortals can look stedfastly up to this Tribunal, and all its terrible Pomp, without any manner of Misgiving or Concern: For even the Best deceive themselves, if they say they have

have no Sin. And, where there are Sins to reproach ones self withal, and great and numberless Frailties and Imperfections to lament, there we are not to wonder, if there be some Thoughts of Heart, not perfectly composed. But, whatever those may be, while the Eye is turned inward upon their own Breasts; yet, when it looks up to Jesus, that *Lamb slain to take away the Sins of the World*, the Cloud is presently dispers'd by Faith in his Sacrifice. The Apprehensions of a Judgment are temper'd with Hope and Holy Trust; and then no longer the Effect of Despondence and Doubt, but only of Humility and Godly Shame, when Sins have been repented of and forsaken, we see God, not as an implacable Avenger, but a reconciled and tender Father. We are sure this Judge will not be *extream to mark what hath been done amiss*, by them who have undone it all again, in second Thoughts, and serious Amendment. Such can behold the Glories and Triumphs of infinite Mercy, in the Son of God, now bright and all-divine, once condescending so low, as to die for Their sakes. They can depend upon all fair Allowances for Infirmities and Temptations, from One, who hath felt the Weakness of Human Nature in his own Person, and did not disdain himself to be tempted. They can support themselves with this

Heb. ii. 4.
Rom. v. 10.

Confidence, that He, who *reconciled* them at the Expence of his own Blood, *while they were yet Enemies*; will not fail to save them by his *own Life* and Power, now they are made Friends. Had such Men been allowed the Liberty of choosing their own Judge, Prudence and Interest must have directed them to Him, who had express'd such unexampled Kindness; One so infinitely Good in his own Nature, and so infinitely tender of, and Good to Them. This therefore is Their Comfort, This their Security, that in his Wounds they have a sure Refuge; That they are united, as living Members, to this Mystical Head; That he accounts Their Happiness his own; That
His

His * *Faithfulness and Truth* are inviolably engaged for their Pardon, and there can be no † *Condemnation to any who are thus in Christ Jesus*. The Plagues and Fears, which wound the Wicked mortally, fly over the Good Man's Head, and not one of them touches him. This gives to such Boldness to lift up their Heads, even in that Dreadful Day, that their *Redemption now draws nigh*: The utmost and most desirable Accomplishment of that Great Work, so wonderfully begun, so wisely carried on for God's Elect; the End of their Warfare, the Pardon of their Transgressions, the Recompence of all their Toil and Sufferings; the speedy and entire Deliverance from Oppression and Wrong, from Danger and Temptation, from Corruption and Mortality, and, which is best of all, from Frailty, and Imperfection, and the very possibility of sinning any more. This is that Blissful Day, in which their vile Bodies are to be *changed and fashioned like unto Christ's Glorious Body*; Their Souls satisfied with, and likened to, the Divine Excellencies; their every Faculty enlarged; and They from henceforth seeing, admiring, praising, loving, living and reigning with, their Lord for ever. Such is the Honour all his Servants have. Such is the Bounty of their gracious Master. So transcendently great the Reward for poor and mean, because they have been faithful and sincere, Labours; so bright, so massy their Crown, *for the light Afflictions of a Moment*: An Eternity of Happiness in Heaven; Happiness as exquisite, as Men are capable of receiving, for a Moment of Sorrow and Labour upon Earth.

* 1 John i. 9.

† Rom. viii. 1.

Phil. iii. 21.

2 Cor. iv. 17.

O Blessed Voice of the Archangel, that shall proclaim this general Jubilee! O Joyful Sound of the last Trump, that shall awaken the confused Heaps of Dust, to Incorruption and Immortal Glory! O welcome Tidings to those righteous Souls, who shall receive the Warnings of this Judgment, with that peaceful Song of the Prophet,

phet, *Behold your God! Behold, your God and Saviour comes with a strong hand, his Arm shall rule for him; Behold, his reward is with him, and his Work before him!* O gracious Sentence to all that love and fear him, *Come ye blessed Children of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the World!* O happy Stewards, whose Talents well employed, shall then be thought worthy that Commendation, *Well done good and faithful Servants, because you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you Rulers over many things, enter ye into the Joy of your Lord!* Grant, Blessed Lord, that these, and all thy holy Scriptures, may be so read, heard, mark'd, learned, and inwardly digested by us, that by Patience and Comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the Blessed Hope, of everlasting Life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Isa. xl. 9, 10.

Matth. xxv. 34.

Matth. xxv. 21.

Collect for the Day.

and faithful Servants, because you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you Rulers over many things, enter ye into the Joy of your Lord!

Grant, Blessed Lord, that these, and all thy

holy Scriptures, may be so read, heard, mark'd, learned, and inwardly digested by

us, that by Patience and Comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the Blessed Hope, of everlasting Life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Third Sunday in Advent.

The COLLECT.

* Luke i. 76.

Mark i. 2.

Matth. xi. 10,

14.

† 1 Cor. iv. 1.

† Luk. i. 17.

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy * Messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the † Ministers and Stewards of thy Mysteries, may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by ‡ turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that, at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

1 Cor. iv. 1.

1. Let Christians look upon their Teachers not as Masters of their Faith or Men acting for themselves, and upon their own Heads, but as Servants employed by

1. **L**ET a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Christ,

Christ, our common Master. But withal, let them consider, how honourable a Service this is, since Christ hath made Them his Stewards, the Dispensers of his Word, and other Means of Grace, to the rest of the Family.

2. *Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

Post, and that which recommends the Persons in it, is Fidelity in their Master's Business.

3. *But with me it is a very small thing, that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.*

Duty, and who does it not so well; and so to prefer one before another, upon any external Advantages, which one may seem to have above another. And therefore the Judgment of Men is of no great weight with me; nay, I dare not rely upon my own Judgment so far, as to depreciate others, and prefer my self.

4. *For I know nothing by my self; yet am I not hereby justified: but be that judgeth me is the Lord.*

ment in my Office; yet I will not be bold to say, any: Because God will make a stricter Enquiry into these Matters, and knows me better, than I do my self.

5. *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*

of God. For all judging of others in this manner is at present rash, and hasty, and unseasonable. You are yet in the Dark, and want that Evidence to proceed upon, which only He, who hath Right and Ability to judge the Persons intrusted by him, will one Day produce. For he will disclose many lurking Motives, that no mortal Eye could discover; He will make plain to all the World, not only what each Man did, but with what Intent and Disposition of Mind he did it. And this is the time for those, who have discharged their Stewardship fairly and honestly, to be rewarded by their own Master and proper Judge, the Just and All-seeing God.

2. Now every body knows, that the main Qualification for this

3. But of this Fidelity Men are not so competent Judges, as to say, who best does his

4. For though, I bless God, my Conscience reproach me not with any Neglect or Mismanagement

5. Let this Consideration therefore prevail with you to suspend such Censures of your Teachers, and do not anticipate the Judgment

COMMENT.

THE Apostle, in the Chapters before, had reprov'd these *Corinthians*, for Divisions and Party-quarrels, sprung up among them, to the great Disturbance of the Church. These were chiefly fomented by some false Teachers, who laboured to ingratiate themselves, by affected

affected Eloquence, subtle Reasonings, and other popular Arts; to the bringing the Simplicity of the Gospel, and those plain Methods of Teaching, used by St. *Paul* and his Assistants, into General Disesteem. This drew on

Chap. i. 12.
iii. 4.

many invidious Comparisons between their Preachers; inasmuch that, not only They, who had been seduced into Error, but even

the Orthodox Christians too, began to distinguish themselves, by their adherence to this or that Person, under whose Ministry they had been baptized, or instructed in the Faith. In Opposition to such Carnal and Mischievous Distinctions, St. *Paul* puts them in Mind, that He, and his Fellow-Labourers in the Gospel, were not, like the Philosophers of Old, Men ambitious of advancing new Doctrines, or instituting peculiar Sects called after their own Names; but subordinate Officers only, and such as made it their Business, to unite all their Profelytes under One common Head and Master, *Christ Jesus*. The Design of them all was the same, and their Commission from one and the same Hand; though they who acted, by it, were different, and acted in different Capacities. The Character then, which they were to be considered under, and the Esteem proportioned to it, must be such as belongs to Persons in Trust. So that no Disciple,

Chap. iii. 21, 22.

gained over by their Labours, might be allowed to *glory in Men*; Since Men were

only Instruments, chosen and used by the Wise Master-builder, for carrying up his Spiritual House. The Edification whereof would be best promoted, by attributing to those Workmen neither more nor less than their Due. Not giving that respect to *Ministers*, which is His Right

Chap. vi. 1.

alone, whose *Ministers they are*: Nor treating those, as Servants of the meanest

Quality, who, though Servants, are yet of the first and most honourable Rank. *Stewards*, intrusted with a

Ver. 2.

Charge no less important than the *Mysteries of God*; and, as such, accountable

to their Great Lord. That the thing they are properly accountable for, is not Skill and Address, so much as Fidelity and Honesty: And, as none but their Master hath Authority to reckon with them, so none but He can be a competent Judge, how they have acquitted themselves in this respect. The reason is, because many things, the most material in an Enquiry of that Nature, are yet in the dark; and like to continue so, till that time come, (and come it will) when not only the Actions of each Man employed, but the true Principles and secret Views upon which he acted, shall be disclosed. This makes it reasonable for every one thus intrusted, to be content with referring himself and his Proceedings, to the Justification and Reward, which every faithful Servant shall then receive in the Face of the whole World; and not to be extremely solicitous, what Others (who see things but imperfectly, who consider and censure them partially, and who have nothing to do to censure these Matters at all) shall take upon them to say or think of his Integrity, in the mean while. This makes it necessary for Men to suspend their Judgments, and not pronounce too hastily, of Things and Persons which they have neither Authority to judge, nor as yet sufficient Matter in Evidence, to ground a Just and Peremptory Sentence upon.

Ver. 3, 4, 5.

This is plainly the Substance and Design of the Exhortation, recommended to our Thoughts in *this Day's Epistle*. Which would furnish me with several useful Heads of Discourse. For instance,

1. *First*, Hence Private Christians may learn, in how honourable a Character those Men serve, to whom the Care of their Souls is committed; and what a Defence this ought to be, against that vilifying Malice and Contempt, which Proud and Profligate People are so ready, upon all Occasions, to let fly at Them, and their Office. For since every Employment of consequence derives a Regard upon the Person

Ver. 10.

set in it, in Proportion to the Dignity of his Master, and his Place, and the Usefulness of it (when regularly discharged) to the Publick Good ; *Ministers of Christ* cannot be despised, without an Affront to their Master ; and *Stewards of the Mysteries of God* cannot be made a publick Jest and Scorn, without sinking the Credit of Religion and the Gospel. We know who hath said,

Luke x. 16. *He that despiseth You, despiseth Me ; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me.* And, lest this should be thought a Saying confined to the immediate Apostles, and Disciples of our Lord then upon Earth, he declares after his Resurrection,

John xx. 21. *that as his Father had sent Him, so He sends Them, (i. e.)* the Apostles and their Successors, upon the same Embassy, and with the same full Powers. (All Powers he means, that were necessary, for the Establishment, the Instruction, the Discipline, the constant Succession, of the Christian Church.) This extends the Privileges of the Ministerial Function, to as many as shall be called to it regularly, while the World endures. And for such, who are guilty of offering Indignities to them, though I judge them not, yet I ought to say, that it highly concerns them very seriously to examine and to judge themselves, for all the Injury and Dis-esteem, which, whether directly intended or not, is yet but too manifestly, in Fact and in Event, brought by Their Means, not only upon a particular Person or Profession, but upon Religion, and Good Manners in general. And let such look well to it, whether their Conscience can, or whether God be like to acquit them, of being, if not *Slanderers*, yet at least *Hinderers* of his Word, and its Success among them.

2. *Secondly*, St. Paul argues here, that the peculiar Commendation of Persons in this Post is, Ver. 2. *their being found faithful ;* And that particularly, in bar to the Encroachments of Some, who bore themselves high upon their boasted Wit and Eloquence ;

quence ; and lessened Others, who did not come as They did, with *Excellency of Speech*, and *enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*. To this *Chap. i. 2.* Purpose he tells the *Corinthians*, that Art, and Ornament, and great Abilities, are not the Things, for which Spiritual Stewards are properly accountable. These are Talents bestowed by their Master, as he sees fit ; The Proportions, and the placing them out, are entirely in his Disposal. They, to whom much is imparted, must have much to answer for ; But be it more, or be it less, that the Steward is intrusted with, still his Fidelity may be the same : and only so much shall be charged to his Account, as was committed to his Management. The Servant in the Parable, who had improved *Two* Talents, received the same Praise, and *Matth. xxv. 22, 23.* a Reward proportionable, to His who had improved *Five*. And reason good ; since the same honest Disposition, which kept him faithful in the Care of that little which was in his Power, would likewise have secured his Diligence and Integrity, in the Care of more, if more had been in his Power. And, when the Apostle argues, that therefore He, and his Fellow-labourers, ought not to be censured or despised, for their unaffected plainness of Speech, or any other Circumstances in the Figure they made, which might to worldly Men seem weak and despicable ; The Inference, I think, is very just, that Poverty, unartful Preaching, nay some degree of Ignorance itself, when not wilful, or occasioned by Sloth and Vice, is not always blameable in, or just Ground of disregard to, Persons of this Character. There are many Considerations, which may render this a Pitiab!e Case ; but not any, that can make it a fit Subject of Mockery and Mirth. And if God himself judge these *Stewards of his Mysteries*, not by the Brightness of their Parts, the sparkling Beauties of their Stile, or the Largeness of their acquired Knowledge ; but by their Industry and honest Care, in using such Abilities as they have, (mean

though they be) to his Glory and Service ; It will ill become Them, whose Servants they are not, to judge them upon these Accounts. And much more irreligious and insolent yet it is, to expose them, upon any such Pretences, to the Derision of Men ; who are so glad of every Occasion, and triumph so exceedingly in the Diminution and Disgrace of *them who labour among them and admonish them* ; that they seem to practise the very Reverse of the Apostle's Command, and instead of *esteeming them highly*, do rather but think the more meanly of, and pour Spight and Contumely upon them, *for their Works sake*.

1 Thes. v. 12, 13.

3. *Thirdly*, This Description of the Ministerial Office is a seasonable Warning to all who take it upon them, what Demeanour is suitable to so weighty a Charge, and how strict a Reckoning they shall certainly be called to for it. For a Stewardship is the highest Trust, and of greatest Concern in the Family ; and therefore our Lord describes it, by appointing the Persons in it, *Rulers over their Lord's Household, to give them Meat in due Season*. The Direction of Souls, and Distribution of Spiritual Sustenance, are Matters of Mighty Moment, such as require the nicest Fidelity, the most laborious Industry. The doing this in *due Season*, that is, Watching all favourable Opportunities, accommodating one's self to the different Exigencies and Circumstances, the Capacities and Tempers of Men, asks great Prudence, and serious Application of Thought. The Consideration of acting in Trust for another implies, that His Advantage should be the chief and constant Aim ; That, to which all Endeavours must be directed, and by which all the Man's Measures must be governed. He, who makes his own Profit the End of his Diligence in this Affair, is an unfaithful Steward, and follows not his Master's Business, but his own. The Flock, and not the Fleece, must be the Shepherd's Care. The Nature of
this

Ver. 1, 2.

Matth. xxiv. 45.

this Office will not allow either Waste or Misemployment; turning to none, or turning to our private Advantage, those Goods, or that Produce of them, which are entirely and of Right our Master's. Because the Office is it self a Trust, and every Trust necessarily infers an Account. Our Lord hath therefore told us beforehand, what shall be that Steward's Fate, who either *smites his Fellow-servants* (behaves himself insolently in his Place, stretches his Just to a Tyrannical Power, and usurps upon the Consciences of his People) or *eats and drinks with the Drunken* (indulges himself in Ease and Luxury, Profuseness and Riot) that such a one's Lord will cut him asunder, and appoint him his Portion *with Hypocrites, in a place of Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth*. And sure, if any sort of Wickedness heat Some Men's Furnace seven times hotter than Others; it must be Theirs, who live disorderly in that Profession, which devotes them to the more immediate Service of God and Goodness; Who abuse the most important Confidence, that can possibly be reposed in Man; who draw Scandal upon their Order and Religion, by becoming Ringleaders in Vice, instead of Patterns in Piety and Virtue; Who countenance Irreligion and Unbelief, by ministring just Suspicions of their Preaching meerly for a Trade; and in Compliance with Interest and Form, laying Restraints and Yokes upon others, which themselves refuse to submit to, in their own Conversation.

4. *Fourthly*, Though the Ministers of Christ are *Stewards* more immediately and eminently, yet every Man is truly such, in what Capacity or Condition of Life soever Providence have placed him. All are not *Stewards of the Mysteries of God* indeed, as these Men are; But this only argues a difference in the Talents, not a Freedom from the Trust. For some Talent or other is committed to every Man, and such, as he shall more assuredly be reckoned with for the Mismanagement of. But of

Mat. xxiv. 48,
49, 50, 51.

This I shall have a fitter Occasion to treat hereafter, and therefore do only put my Reader in mind of it now, to quicken his Care, by this short mention here.

*Gospel for ix. S.
after Trinity.*

5. *Fifthly*, The Judgment, which St. *Paul* professes himself so little concern'd for, and dissuades Others from the Exercise of, is not any Publick and Legal One, which Persons in Authority, whether Ecclesiastical or Civil, will pass upon notorious Offences. This is what the *Ministers of Christ*, as well as Others, are bound to submit, and pay great Deference to. But it is a Judgment of private Persons, supported by no Authority; a Judgment of Partiality and Affection, which meddles where it hath nothing to do, and tends unduly to exalt or depress Teachers, in the Opinion of the World. And in bar to This, he offers Two unanswerable Arguments, The One implied in their being *Ministers of Christ*, accountable to none but their Own Master; who will judge all their Actions one Day immediately by himself; and, who in the mean while judges such as are of human Cognizance, by those, who are deputed to act under him in an Authoritative Way. Consequently, when private Persons take upon them to censure and condemn such, they incur the Guilt of *judging another*

Rom. xiv. 4.
James iv. 12,

Man's Servant, which no body hath any just Warrant to do. The Other consists in

This, that these Men neither have nor can have, sufficient Proof to form a right Judgment upon. Because they cannot see into their Teacher's Conscience, and so, not being able to take a full and distinct View of the Principles he goes upon, must needs be liable to great Injustice, and many Mistakes, as oft as they shall presume to pass a Verdict upon what they see, the Equity whereof will depend upon somewhat, which as yet they cannot see. But it is not designed, that Matters should for ever lie thus in the Dark. For He, whose proper Business it is to judge, will take a time to lay all open,
and

and bring the most secret Things and Intentions to Light. And this Declaration, that such a Discovery shall certainly be made, being, in my Apprehension, One great Motive, which induced our Church to make this Scripture a part of the *Advent* Service; I think my self obliged, in Compliance with the Design of this solemn Season, to employ the Remainder of my Discourse upon it. And therefore I will endeavour,

I. *First*, To shew, that the General Judgment shall extend, not only to Mens Overt, but even their most Secret Acts, nay to the very Thoughts and Intentions of their Hearts: And then,

II. *Secondly*, To make some practical Inferences from this Doctrine; such more particularly, as the Apostle hath led me to, in the Passage now before us.

I only think it necessary to premise, That, whereas the Occasion of St. *Paul's* Discourse engaged him only in that part of the Argument, which concerns the Support good Men may find from it, when suffering under false Surmises, and unworthy Aspersions: I shall speak to this Point in its utmost Latitude; and will represent the Terror it ought to be to Wicked Men and Hypocrites, who, when their Hearts are sifted and laid open, shall as certainly have Punishment and Condemnation, as the Faithful *shall have Reward and Praise, of God.* Ver. 5.

I. *First*, then I say, The General Judgment, at the last Day, will not rest in Overt Acts only, but reach to those, which now lie most concealed, even to the Thoughts and Intentions of Mens Hearts. That thus we shall all be dealt with, the Scripture is express. The Preacher acquaints us, *That God shall bring every work into Judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* And St. *Paul*, besides the Place now under Consideration, Eccles. xii. 14.
hath

hath another to the *Romans*, where making mention of the Day of Judgment, he styles it, *The Day when God shall judge the Secrets of Mens Hearts by Jesus Christ*. Hence David begs God to cleanse him from his Secret Faults. Why? but because These as well as the most Open, if not forgiven, will certainly be punished? Hence our Lord forbids his Disciples to affect Pomp and Shew, in their Alms, and Prayers, and Fastings; for this very substantial Reason, that no good Work of any kind is lost by the Privacy of it. But, even when these things are done *in secret, our Father which seeth in secret, himself shall reward them openly*. And indeed, though the Scripture had not declared thus much, yet the Assurance of a general Judgment sufficiently implies it; and we might upon very good Grounds conclude, that so it must needs be, from the Reason and Nature of the thing.

For the End and Business of this Judgment is positively said to be, *that every Man may receive the things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*. But now such a Distribution cannot be regularly made, except the *bidden things of darkness be brought to light*, and even the *Counsels of Mens Hearts* charged in Account to them. And that for these Two following Reasons.

I. *First*, Because the Seeds of all Wickedness spring up in the Heart. It is conceived, and born, and bred there; And the breaking out into Act is only the perfecting of that, which is come to Maturity, by being carried on, and cherished, in Thought and Intention. S. James hath described the whole Process of this monstrous Birth, in that memorable Text; *Every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust and enticed. Then Lust, when it hath conceived, bringing forth Sin; and Sin, when it is*

Rom. ii. 16.

Psal. xix. 12.

Mat. vi. 4, 6,
18.

2 Cor. v. 19.

Jam. i. 14, 15.

is finished, bringing forth Death. And our Saviour's Argument, that the things which defile a Man are not they which enter into him, but those which come forth of him, proceeds in this manner; Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a Man.

Matth. xv. 19,
20.

Hence we are so often called upon to *purify our Hearts*, as well as to *cleanse our Hands*; to crucify, not our Flesh only, and bring *our Body into Subjection*, but our Affections and Desires too. Because

Jam. iv. 8.

while the Fountain is tainted, the Streams issuing from it must of necessity be foul and bitter. And accordingly our Saviour's Reproof to the Pharisees, who blasphemed his Miracles, is levelled at this inward Corruption, *O Generation of Vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the*

I Cor. ix. 27.
Gal. v. 24.

abundance of the Heart, the Mouth speaketh. A good Man out of the good Treasure of the Heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil Man out of the evil Treasure, bringeth forth evil things.

Matth. xii. 34,
35.

2. *Secondly*, The formal Difference of Moral Good and Evil, depends precisely upon the Design and Intention, with which the thing is done. If this be bad, no other Consideration can make the Action good. Nay, though any Defect render an Action bad in it self, yet none, with which the Will is not in some Degree chargeable, shall make it imputed as bad to the Doer. So that the same Act in appearance, when proceeding upon different Prospects, and springing from different Principles, as to its moral Consideration, is by no means the same. Thus One Man may give Alms out of Charity, and another may give out of Ostentation; One may pray from real Devotion to God, and Another may do it to be seen of Men: One may fast for Mortification,

and

Another may fast to acquire the Character of an extraordinary abstemious and sanctified Person. Both give, and fast, and pray; but because not Both upon the same Motive, therefore not Both with the same Acceptance and Success. He who does any of these upon a worldly Principle, *hath*, our Lord tells us, *his Reward* already. He did it to be seen,

Matth. vi. 1, 2.
4, 5, 6, 16, 18.

and seen he is. This is the Coin, in which he desired to be paid, and therefore he hath no Claim to any Wages besides. But they, who do these things out of pure Conscience, and to approve their Love and Obedience to God, have an ample Compensation in reserve, and shall not be Losers at last, though no present Profit be paid them down in hand. Now the Reason, why the Nature of Virtue and Vice, and the Award of every Man's Remercence, should turn upon this Point, is very obvious. Because the Power of doing well or ill is not always in our own disposal, but the Will to do either can never be out of it; and therefore This is, what we must look to, and are strictly answerable for. He that would do ill, but wants Means or Opportunity, contracts the same Guilt, as if the thing had been actually committed, because his Mind approves and consents to the Sin; And

Matth. v. 28.

thus the Man, *who looks upon a Woman to lust after her*, is said to have committed *Adultery with her already in his Heart*. He that hath a sincere Desire and Disposition to do good, but cannot; hath all the Merit, which those Desires, when fully effected, could give him. And thus the *Poor*

Mark xii. 41,
42, 43, 44

Widow's two Mites are interpreted a Liberality, far exceeding the Gifts of those Rich Men, who *out of their Abundance cast in much* to the Offerings of God. The Reason of which, alledged in a like Case by St. Paul, will hold equally applicable to good Works of any kind whatsoever; that, *if there be first a willing Mind, it is accepted, according to that a Man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*

2 Cor. viii. 12.

That

That thus it is, the Rules of Equity, and Justice among Men, make it plain. For even Earthly Judicatures measure the Fact by the Intention, and acquit or punish the Person accordingly. Killing a Man is the same Act, simply and abstractedly considered, whether it be done by Chance, or in one's own Defence, or with Malicious purpose. But yet the Law looks and animadverts upon it indifferently, with regard to the Mind and Intent, wherewith the thing is done. In the first Case it is reputed pitiable, and innocent; In the second, Excusable, so far as to mitigate the Punishment; In the Last, Capital; and such as ought to exclude from all Mercy. Now the only Reason, why nothing but Words and Actions are tried and punished here below, is, because the Thoughts and Imaginations of Mens Hearts are what we cannot come at the Knowledge of, any farther than Words and Actions let us into the Discovery of them. But this Reason is of no Force in the Proceedings of the Last and General Judgment. There we have to do with *One, before whom all things are naked and open, a Discerner of Thoughts, a Searcher of Hearts*, and an *Understander* of our first Motions and Imaginations. Herein consists the perfect Righteousness of God's Judgment, that no one Innocent Man shall suffer, no one Guilty shall be there discharged; No Evasion shall be left for the closest and most cunning Vice, no Recompence lost to the most obscure and unobserved Virtue. And, since the universal Knowledge of this Judge qualifies him for doing Right to all; his Justice will vindicate it self, in weighing and detecting those secret Springs, upon which the very Nature of a Good or Evil Action principally turns. And we need not be told, that Men are deservedly reputed Good or Evil, not according to the Face and outward Appearance of their Actions; but by the inward Bent, and *Counsels of their Hearts*,

Hebr. iv. 12.
 1 Chron. xxviii.
 9.
 Psal. cxxxix. 1.
 1 Thes. ii. 4.

II. I come now to draw some practical Inferences from this Point ; such in particular, as the Apostle hath improved it to, in the Passage at present before us.

And *First*, This, as hath been often urged already, should make us very sparing and tender, in our Censures of other Mens Behaviour. Because in such Cases we often pass Sentence, without so much as the Possibility of a sufficient Proof. What they do we may know, but whence, and why they do it, we shall never know perfectly, till the Secrets of all Hearts shall be revealed. And, since the same Act hath been shewed to vary, according to those unseen Springs, where the Motion first began ; If we will be clean from Injustice, our Judgment must be suspended, till those too are brought into open View. In the mean while Charity obliges us to allow every thing the most favourable Construction it can fairly bear ; to abate for involuntary Ignorance, for Inadvertencies and Indiscretions, for want of Opportunity to do better, for the many unavoidable Hindrances, and unforeseen Accidents, which may defeat the best Intention, and render the Man quite another Person from what we apprehend him. For, as St. James observes, *To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to Him it is Sin.* To One, (that is) who can, but will not do it. And it happens very commonly, that those Proceedings are severely condemned in our Brethren, which yet would be our own, were Their Circumstances and Difficulties Ours. So that the suspending our definite Sentence, and forbearing to fix odious Characters upon Men, is no more than the constant Rule of Equity directs in all Cases. Not to pass Judgment, I mean, beyond what the Matter in Evidence will bear us out in.

But *Secondly*, If this Consideration will not, as alas ! there is but little Appearance that it should, check the Licentious Tongues, and wicked Thoughts, of Censorious and

and over-busy Men ; Yet it may at least be serviceable to the Support and Satisfaction of those Good People, who are struck at by their Slanders. For This gives to all such a certain Prospect of having their Integrity cleared, and those Virtues, which are so much envied and traduced, proclaimed to all the World. Not One good Action, how vilely soever misrepresented in the mean while, shall then lose its just Commendation or Reward ; and those false Tongues, so industrious to lessen or blacken them, shall be covered with their own Confusion, and found Liars before God and all Mankind. So bright, so triumphant, shall Innocence, and an honest Mind, shine at that Day ; So much more publick shall its Praise be then, than all the Aspersions, which the most laborious Ill Nature can cast upon it here. But especially so much more valuable is that Praise, because bestowed by him, who cannot err in Judgment, and whose Acceptance it is our Duty to aim at, and prefer, before the Applauses of the whole World. This made it in *St. Paul's Account*, *so very small a thing to be judged of Men*, because Mens

Ver. 3.

Judgment is not the Issue, we must stand or fall by. And therefore Every One, who makes it his Business to discharge a good Conscience, may and ought to bear up against any Offence or Misconstructions, that shall come from that Quarter ; as remembering that he seeks not to please Men, but God. And though the Esteem of Men be valuable in due Place and Proportion ; yet if Men will not be satisfied with that which is just and right, well done or well intended, God will receive it kindly, reward it bountifully, and effectually expose Their Malice, and rectify Their Mistakes, who thought and spoke amiss of things, that deserved a better Treatment, and more candid Interpretation. So true is That in point of Reputation too, which *St. Peter* speaks of Other, (but scarce more Sensible) Evils of Persecution, *If ye suffer for Righteousness sake, happy are*

1 Pet. iii. 14,
15.

are ye; and be not afraid of their Terror, neither be troubled. (i. e.) Be not dis-

couraged from persevering even in that

Good for which ye suffer wrongfully: *but sanctify the Lord God in your Hearts. (i. e.)* Shew that ye do it for His sake, and are well content with His, his single Approbation, though all the World should defame and condemn you.

3. *Thirdly*, What a Mortifying Reflection ought this to be to all ungodly Men and Hypocrites, that there is a Day coming, when all their lurking Corruptions shall be brought out in their open Light, all their cunning Disguises pulled off; and even those Sins, in which they most affected Secrecy, laid bare, displayed in their blackest Colours, and published in the Hearing of all Mankind? Oh! What a World of Falshood and Treachery, of Dissimulation and Craft, will then appear plainly? What Treasons and Murders, What perverting of Laws and Justice, What Adulteries and Lasciviousness, What Abominations and Deeds of Darkness and Horror, will then cover the Face of Them, who have imposed upon their Easy, or their Charitable Brethren; to see their long successful Artifices detected, their counterfeit Zeal for God and the publick Good, their specious Pretences of Right and Religion, which have been taken up purely to serve their Ambition or Vain Glory, to pursue a private Interest, or execute Designs of Baseness, and Malice, and Villany? What a Check should this be to them, who indulge themselves in secret Sins, to think, that their Closets, and their Beds, the thickest Walls, and the darkest Nights, cannot shut out that *Eye, which is in every Place*, and to which the *Darkness and Light are both alike*? How Vain, how Senseless is it, to be awed with the Fear of Men, and not to consider that

Prov. xv. 3.
Psal. cxxxix. 1,
2, 3, 12.

publick Infamy and Contempt, which shall be poured upon them, when their most scandalous Practices shall

be

be brought forth, and no Contrivance left to hide, or to varnish them over? Consider this thou poor deluded Sinner: And, if thou wouldst blush, and even die with Shame, to have thy own Family, or Neighbourhood, nay but a Servant or a Child, Witnesses to thy hidden Works of Dishonesty; hold thy Hand, Man, and flatter not thy self with a false Imagination, that these shall always lie hid: But be assured, thy God, thy Judge, discerns them at the very Instant of acting; and, that Acquaintance and Strangers, Friends and Enemies, all the Men that ever did, and all that ever shall live upon Earth, will certainly one day partake in their Discovery. What a Warning should this be to every one of us, not only to govern our Actions, and to set a Watch upon our Words, but even to keep a strict and constant Guard upon our Thoughts, to cherish no Malice or Envy, no Injustice or Uncleaness, even there; to practise no manner of Dissimulation or Double-dealing with either God or Man; since the Secrets of every Kind are sure to be disclosed, every Heart to be weighed in the Balance, and sifted to the very bottom; and nothing will abide the Strictness of that Test, but undisssembled Holiness, and perfect Sincerity? In a Word, Whatsoever it be, that we would not do, or say, or think, were our Breasts transparent, were all the World to stand by and look on, were they that wish us worst to examine every Corner of our Hearts, and report what they find there; all That the Scripture now before us produces an undeniable Reason, why we should not allow our selves in. For it assures us, that, how closely soever we may cover, or how cunningly soever we may carry our Wickedness at present, all will be sure to come out at last, to our Eternal Punishment, and indelible Reproach. There are but very few, I fear, of so clear a Character, that they would be content Other People, perhaps that their best Friends, should know as much of them in all particulars, as They know of themselves:

And

And yet all this, and a great deal more, is perfectly known already, and shall be known to all Mankind, at the Day of Judgment. Which leads me to the Last thing I intend to infer from this Discourse of *St. Paul* at present; and that is,

4. *Fourthly*, Humility, and a Holy Jealousy over ourselves, necessary even for the Best Men. For to this Reflection that Declaration leads us, *Yea, I judge not my own self; For I know nothing by my self: Yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.* Had these Words fallen from some careless Pen, One who sooth'd himself up in a false Security; and took no Pains to search into Things, which, when found and known, were like to give him Trouble; they had not deserved our so particular regard. For many such there are, who in Affliction, upon Sick Beds, or other solemn Seasons of Examination and Repentance, *know nothing by themselves*, and are much exalted with the Quiet and Clearness of their own Consciences. And yet it often happens, that the Faults and Failings of these very Persons have been so numerous, so notorious, that every impartial Stander-by can shew them to themselves, of a Complexion far different from That, with which their own false Glasses flatter them. But when a Person so circumspect in his Conduct, so zealous in his Ministry, so severe a Searcher of his Conscience, as *St. Paul*, supported too by so clear a Testimony, did not yet dare to rely upon This Issue, but appeals to a higher and more discerning Judge; How shall Any, how the Best, and most Wary of Us, presume to answer our Hearts before that Tribunal? 'Tis true, as *St. John* says, *if our Hearts condemn us not, then we have Confidence towards God.* But, 'tis as true, which *St. John* reminds us of at the same time, *that God is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all things.* If our Conscience condemn us, we may be sure God will do so too; because we

¹ John iii. 20,
21.

we cannot know more of our selves, than he knows of Us. But if that condemn us not, it will not follow from hence, that we have nothing, which deserves to be condemned ; because God knows More of us, than we know of ourselves. The Peace of Conscience, which arises from a due Enquiry, and comfortable Answer, concerning the State of our Souls, may be allowed indeed to give us Confidence ; that is, a good Degree of Hope and Trust, that God will accept our Sincerity, and over-look many things for the sake of his Son, and in Consideration of our hearty Desire to do better, and our constant Care never wilfully to do any thing amiss. But can we be confident too, that we have not really done any thing amiss? No, God help us, no such Matter. Alas! How many Opportunities of doing *Good* have been slip'd and neglected, even by them, who are watchful not to do *Evil*? And yet for Sins of Omission only, not for doing Evil, but for not doing Good, it is, that we read *the Goats on the left Hand* are sentenced to *everlasting Punishment*. The unprofitable Servant was cast into *utter Darknefs* for not improving His Talent, and do not we usually account it a great Commendation, not to have wasted, or grossly misemployed Ours? How few are so nice, as to be reproached by their own Breasts, for the Time lost in impertinent Formalities, and innocent Diversions ; for the Wealth spent in Superfluity and Pomp, and any Delights not directly sinful ; for the Study and Wit, employed upon useless Curiosities, and (to say the best and gentlest thing of it) such as tend to adorn, but not at all to amend the Man? But farther yet, Allowing a Conduct prudent and unblameable even in these Matters ; who is He, that hath not Multitudes of Faults committed in Passion and Surprise, never attended to, when they were committed ; and More, which he did attend to, but through Prejudice or Mistake, considered them as no Faults ; and

Matt. xxv. 41,
42, 43.
Matt. xxv. 26,
27, 28, 29, 30.

More still, which when done, and stinging him with Remorse, he asswaged the Anguish of, by pouring false Balm into the Wound, and skinned over the Sore with partial Extenuations; and Most of all, which he knew to be Faults, and for a while was touched with Sorrow for them, but hath now absolutely forgotten them, as if they had never been? Now of all These there is a faithful Register in Heaven, a full and critical Account, where every Fact is entred, its Quality truly stated, each of its aggravating Circumstances charged down to us, Not One overlooked, not One Misrepresented. And to Persons mindful of this, it cannot, I think, seem strange, that St. *Paul* does not insist upon the Testimony of his own Breast, for the final Issue, upon which the great Reckoning was to be adjusted. This, it is true,

2 Cor. i. 12.

was his *Rejoicing*, as he professes upon another Occasion, because it argued his *Sincerity*; but yet he laid not so great Stress upon it, as from thence to insist upon his Justification. For the most unblemished Sincerity is far short of Innocence; and they

1 John i. 8.

who say they have no Sin, deceive themselves, and the Truth is not in them. And, if the

Case stood thus with so eminent an Apostle, well sure may We lay our Mouths in the Dust, and cry out with *David*, *If thou, Lord, shouldst be extreme, to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? But*

Psalms cxxx.

3, 4.

there is Mercy with Thee, therefore shall thou be feared. And indeed herein lies the in-

estimable Comfort and Advantage of an honest and peaceful Mind, that it entitles us to Mercy. But still Mercy is our Last, our Only Refuge: For by a Judgment without Mercy no Flesh living, not the most Holy, nor the most Circumspect, can be justified. And therefore the brightest Virtue sets no Man above Humble and Awful Apprehensions of this dreadful Tribunal; because the brightest Virtue is still but Human Virtue. As Human it must be debased with a great Allay of Frailty, and

and manifold Imperfections. It can have nothing to boast of, nothing to claim, as a strict and adequate Reward; but Much, very Much, to ask Forgiveness for, and a kind Construction of, at the Hands of Almighty God. Happy then are They, and They only, who, in that last and most important Juncture, shall be found in Jesus Christ, *not having their own Righteousness which is of Works, but that Righteousness which is of God by Faith*; Such I mean, as trusts not in its own weak and unworthy Performances, but relies entirely on the Merits and Mediation of Him, who is not only our Judge, but our Saviour, our Peace, and our Propitiation. *To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and One God, be all Honour and Glory for ever. Amen.*

Phil. iii. 9.

The G O S P E L.

S. Matth. xi. 2.

P A R A P H R A S E.

2. **N**OW when John had heard in the prison the Works of Christ, he sent two of his Disciples,

as his Life was shortly to be; that his Disciples might Master, in whom they were not yet fully satisfied;

3. And said unto him, *Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?*

whether He was the Messiah, that eminent Person, who, for the frequent Prophecies and general Expectation of his Approach, was stiled, *He that should come.*

4. Jesus answered and said unto them, *Go and shew John again the things which ye do hear and see:*

5. *The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.*

Messias with his Actions, which would be sufficient Direction for forming a right Judgment of this Matter. Among these distinguishing Characters, One is, that the Poor should be particularly address'd to by Christ, and receive his Doctrines with great Readiness and Success.

2. John Baptist, being now imprisoned by Herod, and the publick Exercise of his Ministry at an end, be turned over to a better

3. He sends them, upon the report of Christ's Miracles, to ask Jesus, whether He was the Messiah, that eminent Person, who, for the frequent Prophecies and general Expectation of his Approach, was stiled, *He that should come.*

4, 5. To this our Lord returned no direct Answer, but only had them observe, and relate faithfully, the Miracles they had now seen as well as heard, and compare the Prophecies concerning the

6. Another, that great Offence would be taken at him. But They were the happy Men, who suffered no worldly Respects, no Meanness in his Appearance, to prejudice them against the Belief and Practice of what he taught.

7. When these Disciples of *John* were dismissed, our Lord speaks very glorious things in his Commendation, That this Person whom the People went into the Wilderness to visit, was not like a *Reed shaken with the Wind*, a Man fickle and inconstant in his Principles.

8. Nor of Gaiety and outward Pomp, but one of singular Austerity;

9. And above the rate of common Prophets, as seeing that *Messias*, and personally shewing him to the World, whom the

6. *And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

7. *And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the Multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the Wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*

8. *But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing, are in Kings houses.*

9. *But what went ye out for to see? A Prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a Prophet.*

rest only forefaw and foretold at a distance.

10. And not only so, but himself a Subject of their Prophecies, particularly that noted one of *Malachi*, who describes him, as the Harbinger and immediate Fore-runner of God coming in the Flesh, to visit his Temple at *Jerusalem*, and, by his Baptism and Doctrine of Repentance, fitting Men for the Reception of Christ.

COMMENT.

IN explaining this Gospel, Three Things especially deserve our Attention.

I. *First, The Design of the Message.*

II. *Secondly, the Method our Blessed Lord takes to satisfy that Enquiry, whether he were the true Messias.*

III. *Thirdly, The Testimony he gives here to the Baptist.*

I. I begin with *the Design of this Message*: which, we are told, was sent by *John*, when a Prisoner, and occasioned by that Relation, which his Disciples had made to him, of our Lord's growing

growing Fame, and great Miracles. Now these are very significant Circumstances, and such as give a considerable Light into the Matter under Examination.

The Scriptures, upon all Occasions, acquaint us, that the Baptist, through the whole Course of his Ministry, had born constant and ample Testimony to the Blessed Jesus; *That* he exhorted Them who came to him, to rest their Faith, not on Himself, but on Him

that should come after him: That he disclaimed all Pretensions to his own being the *Messiah*, even before he had seen and known Him that was so; *That* he afterwards receiv'd an express and undoubted Revelation, declaring which that Person was, by a visible Descent of the Holy Spirit, and a Voice from Heaven, at our Lord's Baptism:

Acts xix. 4.
John i. 25,
32, 33.
Matth. iii. 16.
17.
Luke iii. 21,
22.
John i. 29, 30,
32, 34.
iii. 24, 25, 26,
27, 28, &c.

That he made it his Business, both in publick and private, to dispose the Jews in general, and his own Disciples in particular, to believe, and reverence, and obey *Jesus*. All this was done before his Imprisonment. And we shall offer great Injury to the Character of that excellent Person, in supposing his Constancy so shaken, or his Opinion and Behaviour so inconsistent with themselves; as, after such irrefragable Evidence, such open and solemn Declarations of his Faith, to admit any Doubt, whether this were *He that should come*, the long promised, the universally expected *Messias*; or whether Men were still to look for *Another*, in whom these Promises and Expectations should receive their due and desired Accomplishments.

Some indeed have thought, that the Importance of this Question was, whether Jesus should die for the Redemption of Mankind. But surely He,

who long before had stiled him, *the Lamb of God that takes away the Sin of the World*; And, in all likelihood, chose to express himself so, with Allusion to the Sacrifices slain under the Jewish Law, gives suffi-

cient Intimation, that He was not ignorant of this great Truth. And, for that other Pretence of St. *John's* desiring to know, whether he should come to the place of Souls departed, and preach Salvation to Them; this may be justly looked upon, as an Imagination so extravagant, so very foreign to the Matter in hand, as not to deserve a particular Consideration.

Τὸ τοῦ Θεοφ.
in Loc.

From hence, I think, we may fairly conclude, that the Baptist did not send this Message, with a Design to satisfy any Scruples of his own; but purely for the sake and Conviction of them who brought it: To set them right in their Notions, and confirm them in the Belief of *Jesus*; and so turn them over to their proper and better Master, now that himself was upon the point of leaving the World. And this was the more necessary because their intemperate Zeal and partial Respect for *John*, had hitherto made them averse to *Jesus*, and envious at his Honour and Miracles. What had been discoursed to them formerly upon this Subject, having therefore had but little Effect, *John*, in Compassion to their Infirmary, condescends to have their Scruples propounded in his own Name. And, as this Address of the Baptist is remarkable, in providing so tenderly for his Disciples better Information; So is that of our Lord no less, in his manner of giving it, which leads me to the

II. *Second Thing.* The Method made choice of to satisfy that Enquiry, whether *Jesus* were the true Messiah. As all that *John* had said in Commendation of *Jesus* might pass, with Disciples thus prepossess'd, for an Effect of his Humility and great Modesty: So any direct Answer, which *Jesus* had made to this Question, might have been eluded by the Objection made elsewhere

John viii. 13.

by the Jews, *Thou bearest record of thyself, thy record is not true.* And therefore

fore he refers them to another sort of Evidence, That of Miracles and Prophecies. And, desiring only a faithful Report of what themselves saw and heard, leaves them to their own Master, for the Conclusions to be drawn from thence. So that the Argument in short lies thus: Such and such things are laid down by the Prophets, for certain Marks and Characters, by which the Messiah may be known at his coming; The Disciples of *John* had ocular Demonstration of these Marks agreeing to *Jesus*; Therefore they ought most assuredly to believe, that *Jesus* was *He that should come*, and that, after such Evidence of his being so, they were not to look for *Another*. Now, in order to our discerning the force of this Argument, I shall consider it in both its Parts. And *First*, Concerning Miracles, I will shew,

1. *First*, What Evidence Miracles in general are, that the Person working them is a Teacher sent by God.

2. *Secondly*, How our Saviour's Miracles in particular, proved Him to be that eminent Teacher, distinguished by the Title of *Messias*, or *He that should come*.

1. The Former of these Enquiries shall be fully spoken to *hereafter, and is the less necessary here; because, though the alledging of Miracles in general was a good Proof to *John's* Disciples, so far as it went; yet this alone did not reach the point in Question. It proved *Jesus* to come from God: But many Others had come from God too, and had given the Evidence of Miracles that they did so. But the main Difficulty lies yet behind; The other Prophets came indeed, but not any of them was *He that should come*, so as to discharge Men from looking for *Another*; and therefore this necessarily engages us in the

* Gospel for
ii Sunday after
Epiph.

2. *Second Enquiry*. How those particular Miracles wrought by *Jesus*, prove Him and no other, to be the

true Messias. This is the Prophet foretold by *Moses*, in whom every Soul that believed not, was threatned with utter Destruction. And, since he was to be received with a Deference superior to any Prophet besides; it is but reasonable to expect some Marks, by attending to which, Men might be delivered from the Danger of mistaking any Prophet besides for the Messias. Again, since Miracles were the Proof of coming from God, common to All that brought any new Revelation; And none but He came so, as that Men were not to look for Another; it is necessary, that His Miracles should have some peculiar Characters, whereby the Person doing these might be known to be the *Messias*; and distinguished from any other Person, who should do *Miracles*, and yet was not the Messias. Now, not to insist at present upon any Considerations, but what the Passage now in Hand gives fair Intimation of, there are, I think, Two Things, observable in our Blessed Saviour's Miracles, which cannot be attributed to those of any Others; And Both of them acknowledged to be Distinctions of the Messiah, from any Meaner Prophet, And they are,

1. The Number of them. That the *Messiah* should excel all that ever went before him in this Respect, appears to have been the constant Opinion of the *Jews*. Hence some, we find, undertook to vindicate their going over to him with that Argument. *Many of the People believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles, than these which this Man hath done?* And hence our Lord seems to charge his Enemies with Perverseness, and a peevish Malice, in Terms, that admit their Incredulity to have had some Excuse, in case any Teacher besides had given equal Demonstration of a Divine Commission. *If I had not done among them (says he) the Works which no other Man did, they had not had Sin; but now have they both seen and hated both Me and my Father.*

2. Their

2. Their Quality. By which I mean, not only that Christ's Miracles were, in regard of the Beholders, and in common Estimation at least, greater, more stupendous Demonstrations of a Divine Power, than those exhibited by any other Prophet; but also, that They were such, as the doing of had many Ages before been foretold, for an infallible Sign to distinguish the Messiah by. Those in particular, mentioned in this Gospel, are singled out as such by *Isaiah*; Who describes the Happy State of Christ's Kingdom, by Benefits, which were never fully and literally accomplished in any other Person. For, though some of the Prophets might, upon very important Occasions, be enabled to work one, or a few such Miracles; yet to make it a general Practice in all Kinds, at all Places and Times, was so peculiar to *Jesus*, as to be an incommunicable Property, and uncontestable Argument of his being the Christ.

But there is somewhat more yet, which I would say upon this Occasion. It is, that these Miracles were exceedingly well chosen, to Characterize the *Messiah*, in regard of their suitableness to the Design of his Coming. The Law was enacted with a very terrible Pomp, such as spoke it to be, what indeed it was, a Dispensation of Servitude and great Severity. But the Gospel is a Covenant of Reconciliation and Peace, of Friendship, nay of Sonship, with God; intended, not so much to strike an Awe upon Mens Minds, as to charm and win them over with all the endearing Methods of Gentleness and Love. And therefore the Wonders, that bore Testimony to its Truth, were Works of Mercy and Pity. And the kind Relief they brought to the Bodies, resembled the infinite Compassion and tender Regard, which this Messiah express'd for the Souls, of Men. The Ancient Prophets proved their Commission, by Acts of Divine Vengeance and sore Plagues, as well as by Cures and corporal Deliverances: But our Lord *went about always doing Good*; rescuing wretched Creatures

Acts x. 38.

Creatures from the Tyranny and Possession of Evil Spirits; healing Diseases and Infirmities, but inflicting none; releasing from Death, but never hastening it; inasmuch that, throughout the whole Course of our Saviour's Ministry, we have not any one Instance of his Power demonstrated, in the Suffering or Harm even of his bitterest Enemies. And thus the Argument is uncontestable, with regard to these Disciples, who came to propound this Question. For, if the Messiah was to signalize himself by Miracles, then *John* (for whose Honour they were so zealously concerned) could not possibly be that Person; because it is expressly said, that *John* did no Miracle. And, if the Messiah were to be known by some particular sorts of Miracles, then Jesus must of necessity be that Person; because the Miracles, foretold to be wrought by the Messiah, were done by Jesus, and had been done by no other Person whatsoever.

2. The other Branch of this Testimony consists in the Agreement of our Lord's Behaviour, and the Resentments of Men in regard to it, with what had been foretold concerning the Messiah.

The Former in those Words, *The Poor have the Gospel preached unto them*. A Passage taken out of

Isaiah lxi. 1.

Luke iv. 18, 21.

Isaiah, and applied by Jesus to himself, in

his famous Sermon at *Nazareth*. And,

though not strictly a Miracle, yet considerable enough to be made a Distinction of Christ, who

was in this respect singular: As addressing himself chiefly to People of low Degree, whom the Jewish Doctors held in such Contempt, that it was lookt upon as a reasonable Ground of Reproach to them who believed his Doctrine, that they were Men of no figure in the

World. *Have any of the Pharisees or of*

the Rulers believed on him? But this People,

who knoweth not the Law are cursed.

And also the Predictions concerning the Gospel, and the

John vii. 48,
49.

Entertainment it should find, speak of it, as a System accommodated to Men of humble Spirits; and, that its Success should be most remarkable among the Contrite, the Meek, and those who were most disinterested, and resigned, and mortified to the Vanities and Advantages of the present World.

Pfal. xxv. 8, 9,
14.
Isaiah lvii. 15.
lxvi. 2, 5.

The Latter of these Instances relates to the Offence, which should be taken at the Messiah, to the great Danger and Unhappiness of them who took it. And this was likewise very proper to be mentioned, both with regard to those Disciples in particular, whose Partiality to their Master gave them a Concern in this Warning; And in general, to remove that too common Hindrance of believing in Jesus, which proceeded from his being despised or rejected of Men. Whereas it appears, from the Characters given of him in the *Old Testament*, that this was so far from being a just Objection against *Jesus* being the Christ; as to render it impossible for any one to have been so, who did not meet with such Opposition and contumelious Treatment.

Isaiah viii. 14.
xxviii. 16.
Pfal. cxviii. 22.
1 Pet. ii. 6, 7, 8.
Isaiah liii. 2, 3.

Thus I have done with my *Second Head*, and shall say but little to my

III. *Third*, The Testimony given by our Lord to the Baptist. I have already, in my Paraphrase, observed, that he is supposed to commend *John* for his Firmness and Constancy of Mind, in opposing him to a *Reed shaken with the Wind*. For his Austerity and Strictness of Life, in Opposition to a *Man clothed in soft Raiment*; And to declare him not only a *Prophet*, but more than a *Prophet*, in regard of his having the Privilege of shewing the Messiah to the People personally and present, whom the rest only foresaw at a great distance; and being so considerable, as himself to furnish Matter for a Prophecy, as the immediate Harbinger of God Incarnate.

All

All I shall add upon this Matter, is only a Remark of the great Goodness and Prudence of our Blessed Lord, in the timing and adapting this Commendation, to the present Circumstances and Advantage of *John*. He

Ver. 7.

Luke vii. 24.

forbears saying any thing in his Praise, till his Disciples were gone; to avoid the Imputation of Flattery, or of any indirect

Methods to insinuate himself into their Affections and good Esteem. He justifies his Constancy, when the

Question just before propounded might minister some Suspicion, that his Sufferings had wrought some Change in him, and filled him with Doubts, by no means consistent with the Declarations, he had so freely and

Luke vii. 29,
30, 33.

publicly made heretofore, concerning *Jesus* being the very Christ. He applauds his Austerity, to them, who admired it

formerly, but had heard it cavilled at by the governing Party. And he sets him above any of the Prophets, when in Prison and ready to be sacrificed; to prevent that too common Fault of measuring Mens Deserts by their Fortune in the World; and to shew, that, in the lowest Decline of Oppression and Disgrace, he was in no Degree less worthy of Veneration, than when at its highest Glory, surrounded with Profelytes and Admirers, upon the Banks of *Jordan*, and heard by *Herod* with the greatest Reverence and Delight.

Thus much shall serve for the Heads I propounded to treat of. I will now just mention some few Inferences, very easy, and very fit, to be deduced from them, and so conclude this Discourse. And,

1. *First*, This Question from *John's* Disciples, and their continuing still doubtful and dissatisfied about a Truth, which he had taken such Pains to bring them over to, ought to make us sensible, how great an Advantage it is to sound Belief and a good Life, to keep our Minds free and open to the Force of Reason and Religion; and how

how fatal an Obstruction to both, when they are darkned and barr'd up by Interest, or Prejudice, by partial Affection, and having Mens Persons in Admiration. In such Cases the clearest Light, and the strongest Arguments will not serve to gain Access. Since that may, with some little Change, be observed of very many so blinded and biaßed, which we plainly find to be true of these Enquirers here before us; They will not believe *Jesus* to be the Christ, because determined already not to allow him greater than *John*. The Application is easy to any undue sort of Prepossessions, whether for, or against Persons or Things; And I charge my Reader with the making it sincerely, so far as he finds himself concern'd in it: And I fear there are but few, in comparison, who may not upon strict Examination, find themselves more or less to need this Caution.

2. *Secondly*, From the Method taken to satisfy this Doubt, we may observe what sort of Evidence the Christian Religion stands upon. Miracles, done frequently, publicly, before Unbelievers, before Enemies, Men who could not deny, and yet would have been glad with all their Hearts to find any Flaw in them, any Shelter for their Infidelity. These carried in them a sufficient Conviction. But to whom? To all who would attend to them, who would compare Prophecies and Events, and acknowledge Him for the Messias, in whom these Two concurr'd. But even these did not pretend to bear down Prejudice, and Passion, peevish and resolute Perverseness. Blessed are they that are not offended, because they submit to that Proof, which Almighty God hath given of his Truth, and are content to hearken to Reason, in despite of all the Solicitations of the World, and corrupt Nature to the contrary. But still *offended* many will be. Religion will always be spoken against; and the Rock, on which our Hopes are Built, will continue *a stone of stumbling* 1 Pet. ii. 8.
to the unbelieving and disobedient. And, since we have

fair Warning that thus it will be, this ought not to dis-
fettle us in our Principles, but rather to confirm us, in
the Belief of a Gospel, whose Truth is manifest, even in
this Particular too. It should awaken our Care and Cir-
cumpection, that, while so many are ready to despise
and take Offence at Christ and his Word, we be not
found among them, that contribute to, or give just
Occasion for it. No, rather let us labour by a more
vigorous Zeal for God, and unwearied Perseverance in
well-doing, to put to Silence the Ignorance and Malice
of foolish and gain-saying Men.

3. *Thirdly*, It may not be unseasonable upon this
Occasion, to observe the Season proper for Miracles.
They are necessary to establish new Doctrines, and to
convert Unbelievers; but, when alledged for Doctrines
sufficiently established already; when wrought or
boasted of, only among People, already possess'd with
a Belief of the Points, they are made to countenance;
When in a manner, that seems to fear the being ob-
served, or detected rather, by those of a contrary Per-
suasion; They are then quite out of proper Time and
Place, and do not create Faith, so much as Suspicion of
Fraud. Our Lord proved the Force of His Miracles, by
shewing their Agreement with the Predictions, that such
should be wrought by the Messias. But the same Lord

Matth. xxiv.
24, 25.

hath warned Us, that in *the last Days* there
shall be *lying Wonders*; and therefore we
have Reason to believe, that the pretended
Workers of them in those Days, are *false Prophets and
false Christs*. So great a Difference there is between
the Miracles of Christ, which were foretold on pur-
pose that Men might believe and be saved by them;
and those Wonders of a more modern Date, which
were foretold, on purpose that Men might not believe,
and be seduced by them.

4. *Lastly*, When St. *John Baptist* here is said to *pre-
pare the way of the Lord before him*, we should do well

to recollect, wherein that Preparation consisted. And every one in his Station, but especially the Ministers of the Gospel, who are Messengers sent express upon this Errand, should be careful to make ready the way to his Second, as that Harbinger did for his First, Coming. For the Preparations are, in both Cases, the same; Making guilty People sensible of their Sins, reproving open Wickedness, unmasking Hypocrisy, beating down Spiritual Pride: importuning Men to Repentance; by representing, with a faithful Zeal, the horrible Mischiefs, and dreadful Conclusion of a wicked Course of Life, and the Terrors of that Master, who, at his coming to purge the Floor, will not fail to separate most nicely between the Wheat and the Chaff, and burn the latter with unquenchable Fire. We shall do well to take the Baptist for an Example of our Conduct too; in giving Weight to our Doctrines by a Life of severe Virtue; by boldly rebuking Vice, even in the Greatest, when Duty and a fit Opportunity call us to it; And, if by This we fall under their Displeasure, suffering with a Constancy like His: and, even by our Deaths, bearing Testimony to God and his Truth. These things, duly attended to, would make a mighty Change, even in a profligate and prophane World. And, as it is our Duty (Ourself especially who are Ministers of Christ) to pursue them vigorously: So the Blessed Effects of reforming Mankind are so very many, so very great, as to deserve our daily fervent Prayers, that God would promote and succeed the Good Work. And this our Church hath taught us to recommend very pertinently to the Divine Favour and Assistance, in the Collect for this Day.

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first Coming didst send thy Messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the Ministers, and Stewards of thy Mysteries, may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the Hearts of the Disobedient to the Wisdom of the Just, that,

that, at thy second Coming to judge the World, we may be found an Acceptable People in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, World without end.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent.

THE COLLECT.

Psal. lxxx. 2.
Heb. xii. 1.
Psal. cxix. 32.

O Lord, raise up (We pray thee) thy Power, and come among us, and with great Might succour us; that whereas through our Sins and Wickedness, we are fore let and hindred in running the Race that is set before us, thy bountiful Grace and Mercy may speedily help and deliver us, through the Satisfaction of thy Son our Lord; to whom with Thee and the Holy Ghost be Honour and Glory, World without end. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

Phil. iv.

4. Support your Spirits with a Holy and Spiritual Joy; and how unseasonable soever this

4. **R** *Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again, I say, Rejoice.*

Advice may seem to your present State of Affliction, yet I must urge it again, as a Duty fitting all Times and Conditions of Life.

5. Be not rigorous in insisting upon your utmost Right, nor impatient in suffering Wrong,

5. *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

but let your Temper and Composure of Mind be manifest to all sorts of People, and upon all Occasions. For consider, that the Judge is not far off, who will certainly make you amends for all your Condescensions, and reward all your Patience.

6. Let no Difficulties make you immoderately anxious, but commit all your Affairs to God in Prayer for his Assistance, so as at the same time to acknowledge his Goodness in all the Calamities which befall you.

6. *Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*

7. Thus if ye do, the Sense of a Reward in Christ Jesus, will be a strong Guard against all your Trials, and secure to you such an Evenness and inward Satisfaction of Mind, as we are not able to express or conceive.

7. *And the Peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds thro' Christ Jesus.*

COMMENT.

COMMENT.

ST. *Paul*, in this Passage, exhorts the *Philippians* to the Practice of some Virtues, which are not only useful and proper to all Sorts, and all Conditions, of Christians; but more particularly seasonable to an afflicted and persecuted State. Such as he had before, in his First and Third Chapters, described the Church at that time to be in, to whom this Epistle was addressed.

The *First* of these is *Rejoicing in the Lord* *always*: And, because in Circumstances so distressed as theirs, this might, at first View, look like a Duty impracticable, and out of Time; He inforces and insists upon it in the latter Clause of the Verse; to shew, that his Command did not proceed from any Heat of inconsiderate Zeal, any want of Regard, either to the Greatness of their present Trials, or to that Infirmary of Human Nature, which is too apt to be overborne by such; but that this is a Disposition of Mind, which even those *Trials* would very well bear, nay, which, they required from them. *Again, I say rejoice.*

For a right understanding of this Matter, I will briefly speak to the Nature of this Duty. And then shew, that it is both practicable, and of perpetual Obligation.

I. As to the Duty it self: Let it be considered, that, since Joy is a Satisfaction, resulting from the Sense of some present Good; *Rejoicing in the Lord* must needs import that Comfort and Contentment, which Holy Men have (for none but Holy Men can have it) in an Assurance that God is their God: that is, That they are such, as he particularly loves, and favours, and will make infinitely happy in the Enjoyment of himself. And this is the Consideration, that Christians here are commanded to take continual Delight in, even in despite
I of

of all those Afflictions, which labour to take away or interrupt their Joy.

II. Now that this is a Command, not at any Time, or in any Conjunction of Circumstances, impracticable, may appear from the following Considerations.

1. That God, and such Enjoyment of him as he reserves for good Men, is our chief Good. And that, not only, as he is in all other respects the Fulness of all Excellence and Perfection: but in regard his Goodness is unchangeable, and those *whom he loves, he loves unto the end*. Although therefore to have commanded us to *rejoice always* in any thing besides, had been an absurd and impracticable Command, because all other Good Things are variable and fugitive, short and uncertain: Yet it is not so, to *rejoice always in the Lord*, because he is always the same: A Good always present, and always perfect: One that never leaves nor forsakes those, who are careful not to forsake Him. And when we do so, the Change is not in Him, but in our selves, who fall from our Happiness, and forfeit our Comforts, by breaking that Condition, which God, who is always constant to His part, hath appointed, as the only Means of entitling us to them.

2. But Afflictions are very consistent with this Joy, because God hath no where declared, that these are certain Marks of his Displeasure, or that he loves any Man the less for being poor, or sick, or in pain, or slandered, or hated, or persecuted. These things make no necessary change in our Virtue, and consequently not in God's Love towards Us, and therefore not in our Interest in Him, which is the true Foundation of this Joy. So far from this, that,

3. Afflictions are often declared in Scripture, to be sent for our Advantage, to make us better Men, to advance our Virtue and our Future Happiness, to be placed to our Account in the great Day of Reckoning, and to

work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory; A Glory, with which the Sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared. And therefore the Joy mentioned here does by no means require such an abstractedness of Mind, and unconcernedness under present Sufferings, as some Men would persuade us Human Nature cannot come up to. It being a Principle common to all the Transactions of Life, to be content, and even pleasant, under present Hardships and Sufferings, in prospect of a much greater Profit to be attained by them. And this is all Religion expects from us; nay it does not expect so much as we daily submit to, for raising our Fortunes, or securing our Ease in this World; Because the Bliss we aim at, as Christians, is infinitely more desirable, more disproportionate to the utmost we can endure for it: And the Certainty we have of attaining it, is infinitely greater. In other Cases we go upon probable Circumstances, and great Odds on our side; but here we have sure Promises to depend upon, and such as cannot fail us.

2 Cor. iv. 17.
Rom. viii. 18.

Setting aside therefore the Case of Melancholy, and Erroneous Opinions (which are the real Cause of that uncomfortable State of Mind, that many People, truly good, appear to be under) I take the true Reasons, why we see no more of this Joy in the World, to be, Either Mens own Sins and Failings indulged, which must needs abate this Satisfaction to Them, who are sensible how much they have deserved to lose it; or else Mens too great Fondness for the World, which cannot but at once make the Sense of present Sufferings more tender and afflicting; and their Desires and Love of future Happiness less eager and supporting. For to attain this Joy, 'tis necessary our Minds be of *David's* Frame, when he cried out, *Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon Earth whom I desire in comparison of Thee.*

Psal. xxiii. 25.

From hence the Apostle proceeds, in the next Verse, to enjoin another Duty, wherein we are to consider Two Things.

- I. *First*, The Duty it self. And,
- II. *Secondly*, The Reason enforcing it.

In the Former there are Three Things to be observed.

1. The Nature of the Thing, *Moderation*. The Original Word seems primarily to import such a candid Temper, as disposes Men to an equitable Proceeding, in Cases, for which the Law hath not made sufficient Provision. Not stretching things to their utmost Rigour, on the One hand, Not a supine Remissness on the Other; But receding from our Right where it is fit, and treating Others with all that Gentleness and just Forbearance, which we, in Their Case, would think it reasonable to find.

2. It is ordered, *Secondly*, That this Moderation should *be known*, that is, Not to rest only in the Inward Disposition, but to be manifested in all our Actions: And that, in so eminent a Degree, that it might serve for a particular Character to distinguish Christians by.

3. It is expected, *Thirdly*, That this should extend to all Occasions, and all manner of Persons. For to behave one's self Amicably and Meekly to Those, who are of the same Opinion, engaged in the same Interest, and ready to do the same by Us in return, is no great matter. But to preserve this Evenness and Sweetness of Temper, to such as differ in Judgment, as use us ill; To return Equity for Injustice, Gentleness for Oppression and Hardship; To put the most favourable Construction upon the Actions of Them, who make it their Business to provoke and persecute Us; (as the *Philippians* here are exhorted to deal by their Enemies without exception, whether Ignorant Idolatrous Gentiles, or Perverse Contentious

tentious Jews.) This is a noble Conquest over our Passions. Such, as demonstrates the mighty Power of that Religion, which could have so commanding an Influence upon Human Nature, when touched in the tenderest part. And Nature hath need of some very strong Motive, to check and controul those Resentments, which Injuries and Ill Treatment are apt to stir in our Breasts. Now, what That Motive is, the Latter Clause of the Verse tells us in those Words,

The Lord is at hand. By which Some understand, that God is always present with us. A strict Observer of our Actions; and therefore we should be exceeding careful to behave our selves, as Men sensible, that his Eye is always upon them: A ready Help in our Trouble, and an irresistible Avenger of our Wrongs, whenever he sees fit to rescue us from Suffering, or to call Them to Account, by whom we suffer unjustly. But Others, more agreeably (as I presume) to the Apostle's Intent, interpret this of Christ's coming to Judgment: The time of which seems then to be believed not very far off. And, if we consider that particular Judgment, which each of us undergoes at the Day of Death; (which determines that State of our Accounts, wherein the general Judgment will be sure to find us.) In this Sense, 'tis evident to a Demonstration, *that the Lord is at hand*, and his Coming cannot be at any great Distance from any Man whatsoever. The Sum then of this Matter is, That the Consideration of a future Judgment, and the near, as well as sure, Prospect that Christians have of it, is a good Argument, why they should not only bear Afflictions and Injuries with Patience; not only support and delight themselves in the Comforts of a good God and a good Conscience, as the Verse before directs; But (which is an Attainment somewhat higher still) why they should behave themselves with great Temper, and all imaginable Equity, even towards those Men, who are the Instruments and next Causes of their Sufferings;

And the Strength of this Argument might, would the Measure of this Discourse permit, be shewn to lie in these following Considerations.

1. *First*, The Nature and Design of this Judgment: Which consists in a most exact Enquiry after all, that passed in this present State of Trial, and a just Distribution of such a Recompence, as Mens Behaviour hath qualified them for. Into this Account will come all the Evil we suffer, as well as all the Good we do. And therefore we need not be rigorous to do our selves Right, since there is One coming, who will be sure to right us. We need not scruple any Concessions, or Meekness in departing from what was our due, because in the end we shall be no Losers, for any supposed Advantages, given up by a Principle of Humility, and Patience, and Charity: We need not push on that Revenge so hastily, which God will inflict in his own Time, without our joining in it; and give us the Satisfaction of vindicating his Glory, and our Innocence, to all the World. (This indeed is the only Consideration, that can render the Punishment, even of our worst Enemies, just Matter of Satisfaction to us.) We have no Reason to think God slow or negligent of our Affairs, for the time of hearing our Cause is not yet. And, would we have our Adversary punished before his Trial? We must not grow impatient at the Barbarity, or the Continuance of our Persecutions, or Afflictions; since the Season of Retribution is not come; nay, since even these Delays will be placed to the Reckoning; since the longer we are tried in the Furnace, the more refined we shall come out from our Dross, the brighter we shall shine; and every Thorn in our Crown shall be changed into a Ray of Glory. So profitable are our Pains; so nicely treasured up are our Tears; so gainful is our Loss; so sure a Method of Exaltation is Condescension and Meekness; so firm a Security of our Right, to endure wrongfully, and not insist upon our Point to the utmost; so wise a Course to obtain infinitely
more

more Good than We have deserved, not to requite our Enemies with so much ill as They have deserved.

2. *Secondly*, The Person who shall execute this Judgment; The Lord, even *Christ Jesus*. He who, as at this time, left the Glories of Heaven to put on infirm and mortal Flesh. And, can any Condescensions of Ours be compared to this? He who underwent Poverty and Contempt, Scorn and Reproach, Pain and Death; and are any Indignities, any Wrongs, any Sufferings we complain of, fit to be named with these? He who endured all things by Free Choice; and do We fret and murmur at those, which God sends, or makes wicked Men the Executioners of upon us? He who knew no Sin; and do We complain for the Punishment, nay the much less than due Punishment, of our Offences? He who did and suffered all this for his Enemies, who, in all this Dispensation of Meekness and Love, left us a Pattern that we should follow his Steps; And can We dispute the forgiving of Enemies and Injuries, after his Command and Example? He who is so very highly exalted, so gloriously rewarded for all his Sufferings, and who hath declared, that they who suffer with him, shall also reign with him; And can We doubt, that good Amends shall be made Us, when we see it made so amply to him already? When He is the very Person impowered to make it, who loved us so as to die for us, who declares himself persecuted in his Members, who gave us these Commands, who set us this Example, who knows that we endure purely for his sake, for the Advancement of his Honour, and in a faithful Dependence upon his Promises?

3. *Thirdly*, Another Consideration, which adds weight to this Argument, is the Approach of this Day of Recompence: *The Lord is at Hand*. That is, A Change there will soon be of their present State, and a Deliverance to good Men from Suffering and Persecution. And This at least is One Comfort, common to all we endure in the Body, that such Evils cannot last always,

that they may, nay quickly must have an End. And though even this would be but cold Comfort to Men who had no Notion of a future Being; yet to Them who consider, that the Dispensations of Providence here are not final and conclusive, Who stedfastly expect another Life, for which they were principally made, and wherein alone entire Happiness is to be had, Who are taught, that the Afflictions of a Moment work out for them a Glory that shall be Eternal; To such, I say, even the longest Term of Mortality will seem in comparison as nothing, and the Burden their Master lays upon them, how heavy soever and grievous to be borne it may appear, when abstractedly considered, and with regard to frail Flesh and Blood; yet in the Account of Faith, and when taken with its Appendage of a Crown everlasting, a Bliss unspeakable, a Joy that no Man takes from us, is thus but *Light*; much rather to be chosen, than all the Prosperity and Pleasures of Sin, than all this Shadow of a World that passeth so swiftly away.

Another Exhortation follows; Which, though delivered in general Terms, is yet more especially proper for the Time of Affliction and Persecution. *Be*
Ver. 6. careful for nothing, but in every thing by
Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving,
let your Requests be made known unto God. Which Words would oblige me to observe Three Things.

I. To enquire what sort of Carefulness it is, from which the Apostle here dissuades his *Philippians*, and in them all Christians, under distressed Circumstances.

II. The Remedy for Afflictions, prescribed in the place of their own Carefulness: which is, Committing our Selves and all our Affairs to the Protection and Disposal of God, by devout *Prayer*.

III. A necessary Qualification of our Prayers, even when most afflicted; that even then they be attended with *Thanksgiving*. But these Points justly handled would so far exceed the designed Proportions of this Discourse, that I beg my Reader's leave to refer him for Satisfaction concerning them, to the Places set down in the Margin.

*For the Two Former see Gospel for xv. Sunday after Trinity.
For the Third see Epist. for xx. Sunday after Trinity.*

It only now remains, that I observe something briefly from the last Verse, and conclude this Discourse.

Now here, by *the Peace of God*, Some understand the Reconciliation made with Mankind in our Blessed Saviour; A Mystery far exceeding the Comprehension, not of Human only, but of all created and finite, Understandings: But the Sense most apposite to the Apostle's Purpose, seems to be, not only that Peace, Considered in it self, but a Comfortable Sense of, and firm Persuasion, that we have a share in it; And, that This will, even under the worst Treatment, and heaviest Afflictions, preserve the Mind seriously affected with it, in such a State of undisturbed Tranquillity, as is not possible for any to conceive, whom their own happy Experience hath not convinced. This Sense seems to be much favoured, by the just Importance of that Original Word, which our Translators render **keep*. A Military Term, proper to Garisons, and intimating, that this inward Peace is a strong Guard, and impregnable Defence, against all the Tumults and Tempests of a boisterous and uncertain World: Such as will neither suffer our Hearts to be over-powered, that is, our Affections vitiated by immoderate Fears, or Hopes, or Desires of Earthly Objects: nor our Minds to be captivated, that is, our Understanding and Judgment to be imposed upon by false Notions of Temporal Good or Evil: But will set us above the World, and so support and entertain us with Spiritual Consolations, the continual Feast of a good Conscience

* *φρουρήσαι.*

ence at present, and the Prospect of Bliss unspeakable and immortal afterwards; That any Accidents here below will be incapable of getting within us, or making any disorderly Impressions. But we shall esteem of them, as things foreign to our true Interest, and look upon them with all the Indifference, which the most abstracted Condition of a Soul united to the Body is capable of: Constantly taking Sanctuary in God, as our firm and only Hope and Stay, and using his Dispensations of every kind, as so many Opportunities and Instruments, put into our Hands by Providence, to profit of, and improve our Virtue and true Happiness by.

The only Remark I shall add now is, that, as this steady Composure and Serenity of Mind may be applied to all the Duties, recommended in the Epistle of this Day, as their Effect and Reward: So it is immediately annexed, and seems in a special manner to belong, to that of a devout and thankful Application to God by Prayer. For Prayer is a withdrawing a Man's self from the World, and coming to God; Like leaving a Clutter of Business, or breaking away from the mixt Company of People, offensive and dangerous, or at the best nauseously ceremonious and vain, to solace himself with One Friend alone, who is particularly dear to him. And the diligent Performance of this Duty leaves so sensible a Satisfaction behind it, gives such a different Turn to the Soul, and inspires such heavenly Dispositions; that the Exercise of the Temple, and the Retirements of the Closet, never go off without a grateful Relish and powerful Effect, except either too seldom, or too negligently, repeated. Most seasonable therefore and wise is the Use, which, our excellent Mother, the Church, makes of these Words, in dismissing her Children after the most solemn Acts of Worship, with this Passage of *St. Paul*, in form of Blessing: Imploring, that what he foretels and promises here, may be made good to the whole Congregation. Most properly does She regard the Dis-

tinction,

stinction, generally observed here, between the Heart and Mind, by begging that their Children and Members may be kept in the *Knowledge and Love of God*, and of *his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*: And most reasonably may it be expected, that this Benediction will avail; since, the nearer we approach to God our Saviour, by a Spiritual Communion in Prayers and Sacraments, and all other Holy Ordinances, the better we shall know him; And, the better we know him, the more we shall be sure to love him. And were that Love Entire, did He but reign in, and possess, our Hearts without a Rival; we should then feel the best Sense of that Passage verified to the utmost, in a Spiritual Regard, and in our own particular Case, *That the Work of Righteousness is Peace, and the Effect of Righteousness, Quietness and Assurance for ever.*

The G O S P E L.

St. John i. 19, to 29.

PARAPHRASE.

19. **T**HIS is the record of John, when the Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, *Who art thou?*

19. One very remarkable Testimony, which John Baptist gave to Jesus, was the

Answer he returned to a Message from the Great Council of the Jews. The Occasion whereof was thus. There was, at that time, an universal Expectation of the Messiah appearing. Now John, having baptized great Multitudes of People who had resorted to him, and thereby gained a mighty Reputation; the Sanhedrim sent some Deputies, Men of Note for Knowledge and Authority, to examine, whether he was that eminent Person; or who he was.

20. And he confessed and denied not; but confessed, *I am not the Christ.*

20. To this he reply'd, and persisted in it, that He was not the Christ.

21. And they asked him, *What then? Art thou Elias?* And he saith, *I am not. Art thou that Prophet?* And he answered, *No.*

21. Then they proceeded to enquire, whether he were *Elias* the Tishbite, whom, by a

Misconstruction of *Malachi's* Prophecy, Ch. iv. 5, 6. they expected personally to appear before the coming of the Messiah. To that he answered, that neither was he that Person. Again they enquire, whether he were any other Prophet,

(as

(as *Jeremiab* for Instance) who, it seems, some thought would rise from the Dead, and appear at that time, *Mat. xvi. 14.* This he likewise denies.

22. After having receiv'd this Account who he was not, they desire to be informed who he was; for that was what the Council, who delegated them, would expect to be satisfied in.

22. *Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thy self?*

23. To this he replies, that he was that person prophesied of by *Esaia*s, Ch. lx. 3.

23. *He said, I am the Voice of one crying in the Wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Esaia*s.

24. The Persons who came upon this Enquiry were of a Sect, both Skilful in Matters of the Law, and so capable of judging; and particularly piqued against *Jesus*, and so not likely to make a Report in his Favour; Upon both which Considerations, the Answer returned by them to the Sanhedrim, is of undoubted Credit.

24. *And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.*

25. At last they came up to the Question, which was chiefly aimed at all along; and that was, since he was not authorized by their Councils, nor yet pretended to be any such eminent Person, whose extraordinary Mission and Character might bear him out in acting without their Appointment, how he durst take upon him to baptize, and make Profelytes, and that, not into the Law of *Moses*, but after a new Fashion.

25. *And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that Prophet?*

26. The Justification *John* made for himself in this Matter, was, that his Baptism was not such, as they apprehended. He made no Profelytes to himself, but only prepared them to receive One, whom some of them might have seen, tho' they were not sensible of his Character.

26. *John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one, among you, whom ye know not.*

27. But, that in Truth he was so far superior to him in Dignity, though after him in Time, that he owned himself unworthy to perform the meanest and most servile Office about him. So far was he from presuming to say, that he was either the Messiah, or in any degree to be compared to him.

27. *He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me: whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*

28. This whole Matter was transacted in that Place, where the *Israelites* had passed over *Jordan* formerly, and where there was now a Convenience of conveying People over that River, Which occasioning a greater Resort, was made choice of by *John*, as a fit Place for him to preach and baptize in, and rendered what pass'd upon this Occasion a matter generally known.

28. *These things were done in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

C O M M E N T.

THE Paraphrase upon these Words may suffice for an Explanation. Except in Two Points, which I shall endeavour to clear, and then proceed to raise some proper Inferences from them.

Now the Points I mean to insist upon are,

First, To reconcile the Baptist here denying himself to be *Elias*, with our Saviour expressly affirming him to have been the *Elias*, *that was for to come*. And,

Secondly, To explain that Preparation, which *Esaïas* prophesied should be, and by the Baptist was actually, made for the coming of the Lord.

First, The Difficulty, with regard to the Former of these Points, lies thus. The Jews universally believed, that *Elias* should appear before the Messiah, and that this Appearance should be a certain Token and Forerunner of his Coming. This they grounded upon a Prophecy of *Malachi*; And our Lord allows the Opinion so far, as to answer his Disciples, when objecting it, that *John* was the *Elias*, meant in that Prophet. The Question here seems to proceed upon the general Expectation of the Messiah about that Time. And the Baptist's Character was such, as made some imagine him to be, either the Christ himself, or this eminent Forerunner of him. If then he were not the *Elias*, how comes our Lord to declare he was? If he were, how comes he in this place to deny it? How especially, since he might easily conclude, that the declaring himself so to be, would have very much disposed the Jews to receive Christ, at his publick Appearance among them? For the full Resolution of this Matter, I shall speak to the following Particulars.

I. I shall consider the Prophecy, which is the Foundation of this Opinion.

II. I shall observe the Application made of it to *John Baptist* by our Blessed Saviour.

III. I shall consider the Baptist's Answer here; and shew the Agreement of it, both with *Malachi's* Prediction, and our Lord's Application.

I. As to the Prophecy it self. This we have in Two Passages of *Malachi*, Ch. iii. 1. in these Words, *Behold I will send my Messenger, and He shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to this Temple.* The only Reflection I make upon this at present, is, that by the *Lord* here, the Jews heretofore understood the Messias; that the *coming of that Lord to this Temple* imports his Appearance, while that Temple stood: And that, by the *Messenger to prepare his way*, is meant some eminent Person, whose Ministry, about the time of his Approach, should set things in Order, and dispose the People to give him a due Reception. Consequently, if this Prediction have any Truth in it, it cannot mean an Advent still future, (as the Modern Jews pretend) but must have been accomplished long ago. That is, The Messiah, and his Messenger, must have come, before the raising of that Temple, the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the Dispersion of the Jewish Polity and People.

The Other, Chap. iv. 5, 6. runs thus: *Behold I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. And he shall turn the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children, and the Hearts of the Children to their Fathers, lest I come, and smite the Earth with a Curse.* Here we have a Description of the Person to be sent, the Time of sending him, the Office he was to perform, and the End that he was to serve by it.

1. The Person is called *Elijah the Prophet*. From whence the Jews imagined, Either that the Body of *Elijah* was preserved in Paradise, and should again appear upon Earth, at this Season appointed for it: Or that, this Body being dissolved, God would infuse the Spirit of *Elijah* into a new one, created for that Purpose: So that, Either way, the very Person of *Elijah* should appear before this Day of the Lord. But Christian Interpreters think the Passage intended of One, so very like to *Elijah*, in Temper, in Office, and other Circumstances; that this Resemblance might be a sufficient Ground for calling him by that Name. And for such Figures of Speech, as we have Instances in Heathen Authors: So the Scriptures particularly call the Messias, by the Name of *David*, who was a Type of him; tho' *David* had been then long dead, and there was no Expectation of his appearing again, which could countenance the interpreting that Expression of his own Person. This is so reasonable an Exposition of *Malachi's* Words here, that, besides the incontestible Authority of our Lord, who thus explains it; we have the Confession of some learned Jews, that it need not be rigorously confined to *Elias* in Person, but may mean some Other, called by his name, for the mutual and great resemblance, which should be between them.

Ezek. xxxiv.
23, 24.
xxxvii. 24, 25.
Hosea iii. 5.

See Pocock on
Mal. iv. 5.

2. His Office, or the Business he should come upon, is said to be, *Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to, or, (as it may rather be rendred) with the Children*; that is, Converting all sorts of People, Old and Young, from the Error of their ways; and promoting a General Reformation of Manners among Them, who should receive his Doctrine, and be warned to escape the dreadful Judgments denounced by him, against such as still persisted in their Disobedience.

3. To

3. To which Purpose we may observe the Time, when this eminent Person was to appear, to exercise his Ministry, Before *the Coming of the Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord*. By which, as most Interpreters agree, is meant that Time, when God should take Vengeance upon the Jews, in the final Destruction of their City and Polity. This is particularly, called the *Day*, and the *terrible Day of God* by *Joel*, interpreted in the *New Testament*, by our Lord himself, and by *St. Peter*. The Prophetick Stile is lofty and full of Figures, and often represents the Overthrow of one Nation, in Terms, which, taken literally and in their utmost extent, import an universal Destruction of the whole World. Some indeed confine it to the Day of Judgment only. But, that the Former was (at least primarily) intended by the Prophet, seems clear from This (not to mention at present any other) Reason.

The End of this Prophet's coming is said here to be the preventing, or escaping this *great and dreadful Day*. Which agrees very well with the Prediction of Temporal Judgments, but not with that General one, at the Day of Doom. For that Day is irreversibly fixed, the Season of Mercy is then at an End, and Justice takes place. Reformation comes too late, when Retribution begins; And, if by the Earth we should mean not only the Land of *Judæa*, but all the habitable World, as some Jewish Writers would expound it; yet even so the Description comes short of that, which the Scriptures give us of the last Judgment.

For then, as even the *Old Testament* declares, in a Sense these Interpreters are obliged to submit to, by this Application of *Malachi's* Prophecy, not this lower World only, and the things contained in it, but even *all the Host of Heaven shall be dissolved, and the Heavens themselves rolled together*

See Pocock on

Mal. iv.

Bishop Kidder

Demonstr. Messias,

Part ii. Ch. vi.

Isai. xxxiv. 4.

as a Scroll; When these, as well as the Earth, *shall perish*, be shrivel'd and burnt up, and there shall be *new Heavens*, as well as a *new Earth*. From whence it will follow, that the Text before us is either meant of the Destruction of the Jewish Nation only, or at least so meant of the Last Judgment, as not to exclude, but imply this most significant Type of it.

Psalms cii. 26.
Isai. lxxv. 17.

The Sum then of the Prophecy, thus explained, seems to be this. That, before the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, there should come an eminent Person from God, as a Messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah; That He should so far resemble *Elijah*, as to deserve the same Name; that he should be very powerful in bringing Men to Repentance; and that They, who were wrought upon by him to this purpose, should effectually deliver themselves, from those Calamities brought upon the Jews, at the Time when their Temple and City were destroyed. For this was that *Curse* the Prophet had particularly in view, and threatned his People with, in case they continued obstinate under the Ministry of this Messenger, and of that Lord, whose way he thus prepared.

II. This Interpretation will be confirmed beyond all reasonable doubt, if we consider the Applications of this Prophecy made to the Baptist, in the New Testament. Of which it will suffice to produce Three very remarkable Instances.

The *First* is contained in those Words of the Angel, sent to foretel his Miraculous Birth, where we have him described under these Characters. *He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither Wine nor strong Drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost from his Mother's Womb; and many of the Children of Israel shall be turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the Spirit and Power of Elias, to turn the*

Luke ii. 15, 16,
17.

Hearts of the Fathers to (or with) the Children, and the Disobedient to the Wisdom of the Just, to make ready a People prepared for the Lord. Here we have a great many distinguishing Marks of this excellent Person, which, if compared with the History of *Elias*, will appear to be such a Parallel, as might abundantly justify the giving that Name, to One so exceeding conformable to his Manners and Ministry. *Elias* is represented, as

Jam. v. 17, 18.
1 Kings xvii. 1.

a Man, whose Prayers were exceeding effectual with God, and One, at whose Word the Heavens gave and with-held their Moisture;

which made him considered, as much superior to those who were commonly sent by God to his People: And *John* is declared to be a Prophet, and more than a Prophet, so much more as to have it said expressly, that

Matth. xi. 11.

among them that were born of Women there had not risen a greater (that is, no mere

Man before the coming of Christ, and the Publication of his Gospel, was worthy to be had in higher Veneration)

1 Kings xvii. 4.
16.

Ch. xix. 6, 7, 8.
2 Kings i. 8.

than John the Baptist. *Elias* was a Person of singular Abstinence and Austerity, sustained by the Cruise of Oil, and almost exhausted Barrel of Meal, of a poor Widow;

much of his time was spent in Mountains and Deserts, in long Fastings, and painful Journeys; He was sustained by Meat, sometimes found unexpectedly, and at other times brought him by the Fowls of the Air, separated from the Conversation of the World, and distinguish'd from their Fashions by a peculiar Habit, that carried an Air of uncommon Negligence and Mortification. And

Luke i. 80.
Matth. iii. 4.

John was no less remarkable for his Solitude, and Sanctity, and rigid Abstemiousness. He continued *in the Wilderiness till*

the Day of his shewing unto Israel; And there his Clothing was, exactly like that of *Elijah*, the Skins of Beasts, and a Leathern Girdle about his Loins, and his Meat was Locusts and wild Honey. Before *Elijah's* Translation,

tion, his Disciple *Elisba* prays for a double Portion of his Spirit, that is, such an extraordinary Measure of the Gifts his Master had been endowed with, as might in that respect confer upon him the Privilege of the First-born under the Law: Which was to have twice as much, in sharing the Estate, as any other Child in the Family. And the liberal Communications of this Divine Grace to the Baptist, are not only intimated by those Titles of Honour, by which our Saviour gives him the Preference above any other Prophet; but positively exprest in the Angel's Account of him, by saying he should be *filled with the Holy Ghost from his Mother's Womb*. Meaning, that this Gift should constantly attend him, and should be imparted, in Plenty as great, as the Capacity of Human Nature could admit. In *Elijah's* time the People were sunk into Idolatry; and he stood almost alone in the Worship of the true God; but yet his Zeal and holy Courage was such, as singly, and with wonderful Success, to encounter the numerous Prophets of *Baal*, though backt with all the Interest of a wicked King and Queen, and a debauched Court: At *St. John's* Appearance the Corruption of Manners was no less general; And, though the same avowing of false Gods did not reign then, yet the Service of the true God was so corrupted, as utterly to evacuate the Design of all Religion, by Hypocrisy and empty Forms of Godliness. This the Baptist inveighed against, with a Vigour and Efficacy equal to *Elias*. Such as spared the Vipers of that Generation as little, as the Other had done those in Countenance with *Abab*; and made a turn in the People, as surprising, as that, when *Baal's* Priests were confounded, by the Testimony of Fire from Heaven. It were easy to carry this Comparison on farther, to his Reproofs of *Herod*, and the Persecutions of his Incestuous Queen, answerable to the bold Chidings of *Abab*, and the Malice of *Jezebel*. But

2 Kings ii. 9.

Deut. xxi. 17.

1 Kings xviii.

Matth. iii.

the Instances, already insisted on, plainly prove him to have come in the *Spirit and Power of Elias*; And, that there might remain no Scruple, whether this were the very *Elias* of *Malachi*, the Angel here shuts up his Character with the very words of that Prophet, by saying, *He shall turn the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children, and the Disobedient to the Wisdom of the Just*. The Consequence of which Conversion is, *making ready a People prepared for the Lord*, that is fit, to meet him at, or, as it is there, *to abide the Day of, his Coming*.

The *Second Place*, in which we find this Prophecy applied to the Baptist, is the *Eleventh* of *St. Matthew*. There, upon *John's* sending Two of his Disciples to *Jesus*, in order to their receiving Satisfaction, that He was the true *Messias*, or that eminent Person distinguished by the Title of *He that should come*; *Jesus*, after having dismiss'd them, takes occasion to give the Multitudes a very high Character of *John*. Among other things, acquainting them, V. 10. *That this was he, of whom it is written, Behold I send my Messenger before thy Face, which shall prepare thy way before thee*. And again, V. 14. *If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come*. From this Application of *Malachi's* Words at V. 10. it is evident, that *John* was intended by them; And, from our Lord's own Words at the 14th it is no less evident, that the *Elias* in the *Fourth* of *Malachi*, is the very same, with the *Messenger sent to prepare his way before him*, in the *Third*. Those Words also *εἰ δελεῖτε δεξασθαι*, if ye will receive him, (for thus they may be rendred as well as *receive it*, neither *Him* nor *It* being in the Original) carry a very significant Sense; and such, as will not suffer us to understand them of the very Person of *Elias*. For, had the *Tishbite* himself appeared, or that Fable of a Transmigration of his Soul into any other been the Ground of that Person's being called *Elias*; These were Events, that could in no degree depend upon the Peoples receiving, or rejecting him.

But the Meaning seems to be, that *John* Baptist was the Messenger, sent to perform all those Offices preparatory to the coming of the Lord, which *Malachi* had foretold should be done by the Prophet, upon whom that Character of *Elias* had been fixed. And this he could not do to any, but them who would receive him. For, *turning the Hearts of Fathers to the Children, and the Disobedient to the Wisdom of the Just*, was such a Change of Affections and Manners, as of Necessity requires a Concurrence of their own Will, who are so turn'd. Now this is the very Business, which the Person stiled *Elias* was to come about, and be distinguished by. It was therefore very proper for our Lord, in his Discourse to the Multitudes, to put in that Limitation, *If ye will receive it or him*; Because, to such as were content to hearken and submit to *John's* Ministry, he was effectually, but to as many as would not suffer themselves to be won by it, he could not possibly be, the promised *Elias*.

The *Third* and last Passage, which I shall mention to this Purpose, is that of *Matth. xvii. 10, 11, 12, 13*. For the better understanding whereof, we shall do well to observe, that, Some little time before, our Lord had encouraged his Disciples to Constancy under Afflictions, by Promises of a Reward and Deliverance, at his coming in the *Glory of his Father*. *Chap. xvi. 27.*

For a farther Confirmation of this Truth, he gave a Specimen of his Glory, to Three of those Disciples, at his Transfiguration on the Mount; where they saw *Moses* and *Elias* talking with him, and had a particular Revelation from Heaven, whereby Precedence was given to *Jesus*, before those Two eminent Prophets. For, at the 9th Verse, they are commanded not to publish the *Vision* (what had passed in the Mount) *till the Son of Man was risen again from the Dead*. But St. Mark tells us, they questioned among themselves, what this *xvii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.*
Mark ix. 10.

rising from the dead should mean: Which sure they needed not to have done, if the Subject of this Discourse had been nothing else, but the Death and Resurrection of the Son of Man. Nor could they be at a Loss, what was meant

Mark xvi. 22. *by rising from the Dead* in general; But the Difficulty was, how the *Messiah*, whom we

find them upon all Occasions hard to believe capable of dying, should be concerned in any such Resurrection. And hence it is, that *Peter* could by no means persuade himself, that our Lord should suffer the Things he foretold of himself; as thinking this altogether inconsistent with that Confession he had so lately made, and his Ma-

xvi. 16. *ster* so highly approved, that *Jesus* was *the Christ the Son of the living God*. This

will be yet more evident, if we attend to the Connexion of the following Words. For, upon mention of this *Vision*, the Disciples immediately ask, *Why then say the Scribes that Elias must first come?*

Matth. xvii.
10, 11, 12.

To which *Jesus* answers, that *Elias truly should first come, and restore all things*.

But *I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed*. Now from hence it appears, that, whatever the Matter of that Vision were, or that *ἔξοδος*, which

Luke ix. 31.

Christ should accomplish at Jerusalem (as St. *Luke* phrases it) they thought, that it

could not be accomplished, till after the coming of *Elias*. This Opinion was founded upon the Tradition, and unanimous Consent of the Learned in the Law, and Expounders of Prophetick Scripture: That Tradition our Lord allows to be well grounded, and to have had a just Foundation in the Words of *Malachi* particularly; Which he here, in short but comprehensive Terms, reminds them of; and at the same time, by saying *Elias should come and restore all things*, intimates that Prophecy to be meant, not of such a transient Appearance, as they had seen him make in the Mount,

but

but of a long and laborious Course of Ministry. For by the *restoring all things* is implied all that Preaching of Repentance, and the Conversion of Sinners consequent upon it, which *Malachi*, Mal. iv. 6.
Luke i. 17. and the Angel in St. *Luke*, have set down in Terms at large. In the mean while the Question still remains, what notable Event that was, which the sending of *Elias* is foretold as antecedent to. Not the Death of Christ certainly, for the Scribes do not seem to have expected, that the *Messiah* should die at all; nor do we find any Prophecy, which makes *Elijah's* coming a necessary Fore-runner of that Death. But *before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord, when he should come and smite the Earth with a Curse*, it is expressly declared, he should be sent. And therefore This seems to have made a part at least of our Lord's Discourse, with *Moses* and *Elias*. This, by what hath been said, under my first Particular, appears very properly to be call'd our Lord's *ἐξοδος*, or finishing Act upon *Jerusalem*; And the understanding it in this Sense furnishes us with a plain Account of the Disciples Scruple, which none of the other Constructions, usually put upon the Place, seems to do. This makes the Thread of Discourse very natural and close, when, upon mention of that Vision, (and being forbidden to tell, how Christ would manifest his Glory in that remarkable Providence, till his Resurrection had prepared Mens Minds for the Belief of his Divine Power) they immediately desire to be satisfied in that difficulty, how this can be, since the Scribes all agreed, that *Elias must first come*.

In the mean while this is farther observable; That our Lord, in the Answer to that Enquiry, makes use of the very same Word, with that in the Greek of *Malachi*; That he describes the Office and Errand of *Elias* in such Terms, as left no manner of Doubt in them, that the Person prophesied of there, was not the very *Elias*, who was so eminent in *Ahab's* Reign; but Another, promised

under the same Name and Character. And, whatever were the proper Importance of *his restoring all things*, (which I shall have occasion to examine hereafter) they saw reason enough to conclude the thing exactly fulfilled; and discern'd very clearly, who it was, to whom those Words of *Malachi* must needs belong, for so it follows, Ver. 13. *Then the Disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.*

III. The only thing remaining upon this Argument, is to enquire, How the Baptist's Answer here, which denies him to be *Elias*, agrees with *Malachi's* Prediction in the *Old*, and those Applications of it to him, which we have seen so fully and solemnly made in the *New Testament*. As what hath been already observed may suffice to acquaint us, that it was the general Persuasion of that Age; so hath it been all along the prevailing Notion among the Jews, that *Elias* should, in his own proper Person, come to prepare the way for the *Messias*. Now the World being at that time big with expectations of the *Messiah*, and *John* exercising his Ministry of Repentance, after an unusual Method, and with great Authority; the great Council at *Jerusalem* send to enquire, whether he were either the *Christ*, or *Elias* now return'd from Heaven, as they imagined he was to do upon Christ's Appearance. To this Their Sense of the Question, he replies in express Terms, that he was neither the One, nor the Other. Which yet does not hinder his being, nor at all interfere with our Lord's affirming him to be, the Person foretold under the Name and Character of *Elias*, in the true Signification of *Malachi's* Prophecy; tho' he were not the very *Elias*, who had lived in King *Abab's* Time, of whose Second Coming into the World the Sanhedrim now enquired, according to their mistaken Construction of that Prophecy.

But still it may be urged, that, in Reason and Charity, this Matter ought at least to have been more fully explained,

explained, and those Jews not left thus in the dark, in a Question of such Importance : Since the setting them right in the meaning of *Malachi's* Prediction, would, in all likelihood, have proved a very Powerful Inducement, to their believing that *Jesus* was the *Christ*. I answer, that This was sufficiently done in those Words at V. 23. Where to that *Quere, Who art thou that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thy self? He said, I am the Voice of one crying in the Wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Esaias.* For the clearing this Point, we are to observe, that the Jews, besides their Scriptures, seem to have had constant authentick Traditions ; whereby the darker Passages of the Prophetick Writings, (several of those especially which relate to the Times of the *Messias*) were interpreted.

See Judgment of the Jewish Church against the Unitar. Ch. ii.

This Consideration is of great weight, in the Matter now before us. For, as the *Elias* in *Malachi* iv. appears to be the very same with the Messenger sent before his face, Ch. iii. 1.

Matth. xi. 10, 14.

by our Lord's applying those Two Scriptures together to the Baptist : So *Malachi's* Messenger, and *Esaias's* Voice of one crying in the Wilderness, appear no less evidently to be meant

Mark i. 1, 2, 3, 4.

of the same Person, by *S. Mark's* Application of both to the same Baptist. The very first Period of his Book runs thus, *The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, As it is written in the Prophets, Behold I send my Messenger before thy Face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the Wilderness, and preach the Baptism of Repentance for remission of Sins.* To support this Argument, I need not insist upon the Divine Assistance and Inspiration ; but would only ask, that *St. Mark* may be allowed to have common Sense.

For

For it would plainly argue a Man forsaken even of That, to lay the very Foundation of his Book, in Two Prophecies joined together, whose Agreement in the same Object was disputed. Especially, where there were so many Enemies, who wanted neither Inclination nor Skill, to confute and put him to Shame, in any Misconstructions of this kind. If then (to return to the Matter in hand) If that Prophecy of *Esaïas* did, and were acknowledged to point, at the same Person with the other in *Malachi*; It follows that the Baptist, by returning Answer to those great Oracles in the *Sanhedrim*, that he was *Isaiab's* Voice crying in the Wilderness, did, in Effect, and by necessary Consequence, affirm himself to be *Malachi's Elias*, though not that *Elias*, whom they erroneously expected. And thus St. *John's* Answer to the Jews, is so far from contradicting what our Lord asserts concerning him, however in Words there may seem some Inconsistence, that it is in Truth the very same Thing; The Persons in *Esaïas* and *Malachi* the same, and the Business they came about the same. All which appear more plainly, if we now in the

Second Place, consider the Preparation, which it was foretold this Person should make, and how that Prediction was actually fulfilled in *John Baptist*. Would the Measure of this Discourse allow it, yet to enlarge upon this Head now were less Proper, than to defer that

St. John Baptist's Day.

to another Occasion, which will offer it self hereafter. All therefore needful to be done at present, is only to consider the Importance of those Phrases, whereby the Prophets foretold this Person and his Office, and briefly to observe what Completion they found, in his Execution of it.

The Passage in *Isaiab* manifestly alludes to Harbingers, and such other Officers, as, upon the Journeys of Princes, were employed to take care, that the ways should be levelled and put in Order, and all such Obstructions removed, as might obstruct their Passage or render it less

easy

easy and commodious. Thus upon the King of Glory's Approach, the Preaching and Baptism of *John* put Mankind into a Posture of receiving him, and greatly facilitated the Design of his Coming; by bringing them to a due Sense of their Sins; by disabusing them, with regard to those Advantages they vainly flattered themselves in, upon the Account of a carnal Descent from *Abraham*, or the superstitious Observance of a ritual Law: by foretelling the dreadful Effects of God's Anger, upon All, who did not apply themselves to true Holiness, and bring forth Fruits worthy of Repentance. And, in regard Baptism was always look'd upon to be a very significant and solemn thing, an Engagement to Duty, and an entring into Covenant with God; This, when administred by *John*, to Persons already under the Obligation of the Law, shewed, that, as the Jews used to receive their Profelytes in this Manner, so the Persons baptized by *John*, did also undertake some new Conditions, and indent for some Privileges, which they did not understand themselves to be comprehended in before. Thus did he baptize them with a *Baptism of Repentance*, to become effectual for the Remission of Sins; By the Faith and Obedience of Him, whom he then shewed them personally, as the *Lamb of God that taketh away the Sin of the World*; And by making that Belief and Obedience the Sole Condition of being pardoned and accepted. Upon these Accounts he is properly said to prepare the Way of the Lord, and to restore, or, as some understand the Word, ἀποκαταστήσει, to finish and perfect all Things; Not only reducing them into due Order for the Messiah's Approach, but putting an End to the Old, and making an Entrance for them into the New, Dispensation. In which Sense Many have understood those Words, *that the Law and the Prophets prophesied until John*; and That Allusion of the Fathers, Matth. xi. 13. who represent the Baptist, as a sort of middle Partition between the Law and the Gospel. Of the Law, as a
thing

thing past, and now come to a Period ; Of the Gospel, as commencing under Him, who was then actually present in Person, and, with regard to his Offices, just then about to be manifested among them. And therefore, since no part of *John's* Doctrine terminated in himself; and since his Baptism referr'd them to Christ for Acceptance and Salvation, he is most properly said *to prepare his way* by his Ministry. But this he also did, in a more remote and obscure Sense, by several other Circumstances, relating to his own Person and Behaviour, which were eminent Figures of *Jesus Christ*, and shall (by God's Assistance) be taken into particular Consideration hereafter.

In the mean while, I shall conclude my present Discourse with a few practical Reflections, arising from the Portion of Scripture before us, and suitable to that Season, for which the Church hath here recommended it, as a proper Subject of every Christian's Meditation.

I. St. *John*, in the Place now under Consideration, hath set us an excellent Pattern of true Humility. The Questions, regarding those Notions of the Pharisees, which would have tended to advance him in Honour and Esteem with the People, he returns Answer to, in Negatives so direct and plain, as would admit of no Ambiguity, no Doubt at all. Those, which concern his true Character, he is content with such Replies to, as refer to a past Prophecy concerning himself, and leave Them to draw the Consequences arising from it. The Testimony borne to our blessed Lord, is conceived in Terms so respectful and magnificent, as would not give the least Encouragement, for the most zealous of his Admirers, to draw any Comparison between *Jesus* and Him. Thus what might tend to remove all Opinions of his being greater than in Truth he was, is industriously contrived, to undeceive his most partial Followers; What was strictly his Right, is very sparingly and modestly delivered; And that, which imports the Preference due to that

that eminent Person, whose Forerunner he was, declares a Distance as great, a Reverence as profound, as Words could possibly express. How different a Conduct is this now, from that, which the generality, even of Them, that would appear free from Vanity and Presumption, are used to exercise upon the like Occasions? How well content are such to let the World go on, in those Mistakes concerning them, which make for their own Advantage? How willing to appear in a false Light, at least to excuse themselves from setting their own Characters in a true One, by lessening that Esteem, which comes from Other Men thinking more highly of them, than they ought to think? How does This reproach all that laboured Artifice of a dissembled Humility, which renders a wilful depreting of one's own Worth, only a nicer way of commending and exalting it? which holds fast with one Hand what it would seem to give up with the other, and, by an Affectation of Modesty, contrives to be more successfully Arrogant and vain? The glorious things, spoken of *John* elsewhere, he might, without any breach of Truth, have declared to those Jews of himself; but That eminent Messenger, sent to prepare the way of the Lord, That figurative *Elias*, who came in the Spirit and Power of the *Tishbite*, That *Prophet and more than a Prophet*, That excellent Person, than whom *there had not risen a greater among them that are born of Women*, describes himself only in that of a *Voice crying in the Wilderness*; the lowest of all the Characters, which the Ancient Prophets had represented him by.

Thus have we, in the Baptist, a *second* Instance of Humility; Which, when unfeigned, is by no means jealous of its utmost Right; but so far from invading what belongs not to it, that it does not claim, nor is tenacious of its own: is well satisfied to appear in its meanest Figure, and even glad to seem little in the Eyes of the World, that it may be greater in the Eyes of God. But especially it is never eager to magnify it self; Choosing rather

rather to win Esteem by Modesty and Good Works, than to lay claim to it, by an anxious and unseemly publishing of its own Qualifications and Deserts: Highly contented to become an Instrument of God's Glory, and the Good of Men, even in the meanest Capacity; and accounting it no Shame, to have Others thought better than One's self.

Which leads me to a *Third*, and that the highest Instance of the Baptist's Humility, express'd in those Words, *I baptize with Water, but there stand-*
Ver. 26, 27. eth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to unloose. Emulation and Envy are inseparable Attendants upon Pride; And They who can be content with Equals, often find it hard to acknowledge, and harder yet to rejoice in, the Excellencies of Others, superior to their own. But here we find the Baptist, upon all Occasions, not only depressing his own Worth, but industriously extolling and declaring a mighty Satisfaction in, those more liberal Communications of the Holy Spirit to *Jesus*, which gave him incomparably the Preference above himself. And this is a noble pitch of Humility; when we, after his Example, can see, and be just to, and sincerely congratulate, the Merits and distinguishing Abilities of our Brethren, without thinking our own at all disparaged, or taking less Comfort in them, by their being more Happy, and in more Esteem, than our selves. This is therefore described, as one of the Characters of Charity, that it does not only not *vaunt it self*,
1 Cor. xiii. 4 but not envy others. The eminent Person now before us hath left us a Pattern of Virtue, conspicuous in no one Instance more, because perhaps in none more seldom imitated, than in those frank Confessions to his own Disciples, who most unlike their Master in this Point, could so ill brook a Rival of his Honour: *He must increase, but I must decrease. He that bath the*
Bride,

Bride, is the Bridegroom, but the Friend of the Bridegroom which standeth and beareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's Voice. This my Joy therefore is fulfilled.

John iii. 29, 30,
31.

He that cometh from above, is above all. And again, To shew the Vastness of the Distance, and how Impious it was, even to admit of any Comparison between them, (in the Words now under Consideration,) *He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to unloose.* And this was a Qualification, very necessary to be insisted upon. For, till we have subdued this Spirit of Emulation, and brought our Minds to be content with being excelled by others, to be thankful for God's making them greater Instruments of his Glory, and to do Right to their Abilities for this Purpose, to rejoice in the Honour They acquire, by them, and not to think Our Worth eclipsed by Their brighter Lustre; We do but flatter our selves with a dissembled Pride, and are not yet come up to that Pitch of true Humility, of which this Day's Gospel proposes the Baptist for our Pattern.

2. *Secondly,* These Words of St. John, last insisted upon, deserve to be very seriously considered, because they seem to contain a clear Intimation of our Blessed Lord's Divine Nature and Excellencies. For, what Excellencies, less than Divine, could justify that awful Distance they express, between so eminent a Person, and the Holy Jesus? They are not Words of Complement and Form, but of strict Truth and Equity. And yet it will be very hard to understand them so, if the Comparison be stated, only between One Prophet and Another, only between the Prince and so venerable a Harbinger: In short, if we understand Them any otherwise, than Thus, that even He that *was more than a Prophet*, and than whom there had not

Mat. xi. 9, 11.

risen a greater ever born of Women, was notwithstanding, so many Degrees inferior to Him, whose Way he came

came to prepare, because he was so the Son of a Woman, as to be more than Man: The Son of God, and himself very God. And thus considered, the Passage now before us, is so far from an affected Strain of depressing himself, and magnifying his Master; that, could St. *John* have found any Terms yet more lowly, they were still all far less than were due to that Infinite Distance, that Essential Greatness, between which, and the most exalted of all its Creatures, there is no Comparison, nay not any manner of Proportion, to found a Comparison upon.

3. But then the greater Obligation have we, *Thirdly*, to use all possible Endeavours, for disposing our Souls to the Virtue I have been enforcing. For, if a Person so highly favoured, so magnificently spoken of as the Baptist, were not worthy to serve this Lord in the meanest Capacity; how low an Opinion ought We to conceive of our selves, whose Sanctity and Graces fall so very much beneath this bright Example? How great is the Honour of being admitted to serve him? How mighty the Condescension of accepting, and rewarding, those poor Expressions of the Homage due to his Majesty, from weak and frail Mortals, and (which does most of all depreciate our Services) from vile polluted Sinners? How seasonably is this Pattern of Humility recommended to our Thoughts and Imitation? How powerfully ought it to influence our Souls, Now especially, when the approaching Festival calls upon us, to commemorate an Instance of it, so much more astonishing? If the Pattern set us by *John*, should move, behold a greater than *John* is here. For God himself descends from Heaven; He does not disdain the Womb of a Virgin, the Miseries, Infirmities, and Sufferings of Human Flesh; He exhibits himself to us in the Form of a gentle Babe, in the Circumstances of a Birth void of Worldly Pomp; not in Swadling Clothes only, but in a Manger too; With all the Marks of Poverty and Neglect; He vouchsafes not only to be Man,

Man, but to appear the last and lowest of Men: And He, whose Shoes the purest Spirit, and the Person exalted above the highest Prophets, was not worthy to unloose, does, if I may so say, stoop down to unloose the Latchet of the meanest of his Servants. *Lord, what is Man that thou shouldest thus consider him, or the Son of Man that thou shouldest with such amazing Humility visit him!* But, Lord, what are We, if this mysterious Condescension do not excite our Wonder, do not provoke our Imitation? And how absurdly do we celebrate the inestimable Blessing of God manifested in the Flesh, if our Hearts be not prepared with that humble Disposition, which is so frequently inculcated in thy Gospel, which was so particularly conspicuous in thy Nativity, and to the inimitable Perfection whereof, we owe all the great things thou wert pleased to do, and all the bitter things thou wert content to suffer, for the Redemption of thy own wretched Creatures? O come then now into our Souls, as thou didst heretofore into our Flesh! Make us like Thee, as thou wert made like Us; like Thee in abasing our Selves here, that we may, like Thee, be highly exalted hereafter.

The Nativity of our Lord, or Birth-Day of CHRIST, commonly called Christmas-Day.

THE COLLECT.

Almighty God, who hast * given us thy only begotten Son to take our Nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of † a pure Virgin; Grant that we being † regenerate, and made thy Children by adoption and grace, may daily be * renewed by thy Holy Spirit, through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee, and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

* John iii. 16, i. 14.

† Luke i. 27.

Mat. i. 25.

† John i. 12, 13.

Rom. 8. xv.

* Tit. iii. 5.

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

Hebr. Ch. i.

1. God, who never suffered Mankind to be left without all Knowledge of himself and his Will, hath yet distributed that Knowledge, in such different Methods and Proportions as he saw fit. To the Jews particularly, and their Ancestors, he revealed his Will by Prophets; but this was done by Picemeals and Parcels; and to them he discovered himself in Visions, Clouds, Dreams, Figures, and great Variety of Inspirations.

1. **G**OD, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets,

2. This was the Condition of former Ages, and of that imperfect Dispensation; but the Gospel, which is the last Men are to expect, gives us a full Declaration of his Will; and excels the rest infinitely, upon the account of that Hand which brings it to us. For this is no less a Person than his own Divine Son, to whom he hath given an universal Dominion over all his Creatures. Nor is it strange that they should all be subjected to this God-man; since He as God, was the Lord and Creator of them all; equal in Power to his Father.

2. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.

3. Of the same Divine Majesty and Substance, a Beam of the same Light, an exact Resemblance of his original Perfections. For whatever Excellencies are in the Father, the same are in the Son, and by Him they are reflected down upon Mankind. As he did with the Father create, so does he with him preserve and govern, all things by the same Almighty Power. And therefore, when this Divine Person had condescended to become Man, and expiate for our Offences by the Sacrifice of himself, God exalted his Human Nature to his Throne, and gave him an unlimited Dominion.

3. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

4. Preferring him as far above the most glorious Spirits the Angels, as his Divine Original had set him above them before; as a Creator is above Creatures, a King above Subjects, a Son above Servants.

4. Being made so much better than the Angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

5. This is very manifest, from the different Manner of Expression used in Scripture, with regard to Him and Them. For those Passages, which concern'd Christ, were never meant of any Angels. Nor does God call Them Sons begotten of him, or declare himself Their Father, in that strict Signification peculiar to this Son, who was begotten from all Eternity, and declared of the same Divine Excellencies with the Father, by his Resurrection from the Dead.

5. For unto which of the Angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.

V. I. commonly called CHRISTMAS-DAY. 147

6. And again, when he bringeth the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the Angels of God worship him.

equalling the Angels to him, that it commands them to pay him the humblest Adoration.

7. And of the Angels he saith, who maketh his Angels spirits, and his Ministers a flame of fire.

vants; And the Efficacy of their Ministry, as well as the Nature, is described by comparing them to other Creatures, such as Winds, and Fire;

8. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy Kingdom.

9. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God, even thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

nistration; Nay he is addrest to as God, of the same incomprehensible Perfections, and One with that Father, who hath thus dignified his Human Nature: For,

10. And Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands.

11. They shall perish, but thou remainest, and they all shall wax old as doth a garment.

12. And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

farther manifest, by the same Passage taking notice, that these Creatures are subject to Change and Decay, and that They shall actually be by his Almighty Power one Day demolished: Laid aside like a Garment, put off to be worn no more; whereas His Kingdom and Nature are acknowledged to be eternal and immutable.

6. Likewise another Psalm, relating to this Heir's Investiture in his Kingdom is so far from

7. Those Blessed Spirits are always mentioned in the Capacity of Servants the Activity of their Nature;

8, 9. But the Son is mentioned as a King seated upon an eternal Throne; and exalted far above any Creature whatsoever, as a Reward for the Justice of his Admini-

10, 11, 12. It is also observable, that another Psalm attributes to the Son the Creation of Heaven and Earth; Which of necessity supposes him to be very God, and to have been before the things created by him. As is

COMMENT.

THE Author of this Epistle doth, in this and some following Chapters, plainly make it his Business, to prove the just Pre-eminence of the Christian Dispensation, above any other which had been then, I may add, or should at any time afterwards obtain, in the World. Which Design he pursues, as upon sundry other Arguments, not falling properly under our present Consideration; so in the Passage now before us, especially

from Two, which I shall make the Subject of this Discourse upon it.

I. The *First* is, The Perfection of this above any Other Revelation of the Divine Will to Mankind.

II. The *Second* is, The Excellence of that Person, by whom this Revelation was imparted. Upon Each of which, when I shall have so far enlarged, as is necessary for a due Explanation of the Point; it shall be my endeavour to leave them both upon my Reader's Mind, with such Applications, as are suitable to the Matter in hand, and to the Solemnity of this important Festival.

I. I begin with the Perfection of the Christian Revelation, above any Other afforded to Mankind. And here we may observe,

1. *First* of all, That the Condition of the greatest part of the World, before the coming of our Blessed Saviour, was such, as would admit of no manner of Comparison, with the Advantages that followed after it. Of Them it is, that St. *Paul* speaks, when in his Apology to the *Athenians*, he calls the Ages before Christ, *the Times of Ignorance*; And, when observing to the Men of *Lystra*, That God in times past suffered all Nations to walk in their own ways, allowing little other Knowledge of himself, than what must be the natural Result of that regular Providence, which sustains and governs the World. For so he goes on there, *Nevertheless he left not himself without Witness, in that he did good, and gave us Rain from Heaven, and fruitful Seasons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladness*. And how few would They be, who wisely considered, and improved those gracious Distributions, as they might have done? Nay, how poor and defective would that Knowledge and Service of God be, which, even by Them, who made the utmost Improvement those Events were

Acts xvii. 30.
xiv. 16.

Ver. 17.

V. I. commonly called CHRISTMAS-DAY. 149

were capable of, could possibly be attain'd ; if compared with the Discoveries God made of his Nature and Will, by exprefs Revelation and Rules of Living? So just Reason had the Psalmist to glory in the distinguishing Kindness of Almighty God to his favourite People ; *He sheweth his Word unto Jacob, his Statutes and his Judgments unto Israel ; He hath not dealt so with any Nation, and as for his Judgments, they have not known them.*

Pfal. cxlvii. 19,
20.

When therefore this Epistle begins with a Comparison, between the *Jewish* and the *Christian* Revelation ; we may very well understand the Reason of doing so to be, not only, because the Persons, immediately address'd to, were concerned in the Former of those Revelations ; but because the Circumstances of no other People but Them, could pretend to rival, could indeed be worthy, so much as to be named with, Ours upon this Account. And therefore, to shew the Christian's Advantage confessedly above that of all Mankind, in Point of Divine Light and Knowledge, no more was necessary, than to prove it superior to any, in Times past, afforded to the *Jews*. And how far it was so, besides what will come under Observation, when my Second Particular shall be treated of, we have fair Intimation given us in these *Two* Respects.

1. The Methods, by which such Knowledge was communicated heretofore, Ver. 1.

2. The Title given to the Christian Dispensation, when calling it *the last Days*, Ver. 2.

1. The *First* Difference between these Two Dispensations, taken notice of to Our Advantage, is contained in those Words, *at sundry times, and in divers manners*. For thus God's speaking to the Fathers of these Hebrews by the Prophets is described, Ver. 1. Now, though our Reading give the Truth and Remote Sense of the Text, yet the Word rendred *sundry* Πολυμερῶς,
times, does more immediately, and properly import by

several parcels. So then the Intent of the Place is, that the Knowledge of God, and of his good Pleasure, was dealt out to the Israelites in distinct Portions ; And that with such Frugality (if I may have leave so to speak) as constantly to have some reserve of fresh Discoveries for succeeding Ages, which those that went before had lived in Ignorance of.

To make this plain, we need no other Instance, than That, which was in Truth the End and Aim, not only of the Law, but of all the Dispensations from the beginning of the World: The Redemption, I mean, of Mankind, by Christ the Blessed. Observe then the gradual Notices of Him, and the Characters, by which he should be distinguished at his Coming. To *Adam* and

Eve we find him promised in general, * as a Man ; To *Abraham*, † as His Posterity ; To *Jacob*, as descending from the Tribe of ‡ *Judah* in particular ; To *David*, it was revealed, that he should be of his Family, and the * *Fruit of his Body* ; To *Micah*, that he should be born † in *Bethlehem* ; To *Isaiab*, that his Birth should be miraculous, and his ‡ Mother a Virgin ; To the same Prophet, the End * and beneficial

Effects of his Death ; To *Daniel*, not these only, but the precise time of his Suffering ; To *Haggai* (Last-ly) and *Zechariab*, and *Malachi*, that all these Events should be † accomplished, before the Destruction of the Second Temple. Now, not to mention any more, if we compute the Seasons of these few ; The general Prediction of a Saviour in Human Nature, will be found to bear Date before that of his being *Abraham's* Seed, about Two thousand and fourscore Years ; From This to the Declaration of his particular Tribe, were Two hundred and Fourscore Years ; Thence to the Prophecy of his particular Family, above Six hundred Years ; After that, to the Signification of the Manner and Place of

* Gen. iii. 15.

† Gen. xvii.

xxii. 18.

‡ Gen. xlix. 10.

* Psal. cxxxii.

† Mic. v. 2.

‡ Isai. vii. 10,

&c.

* Isai. liii.

Dan. ix.

† Hag. ii.

Zech. xiv.

Mal. iii. iv.

of his miraculous Nativity, more than Three hundred Years; And, *Lastly*, That of his Appearance and Death, not long before the Destruction of the Second Temple, (foretold by *Daniel* and the rest after the Captivity) must have followed all the fore-named Prophecies, at the Distance of Three hundred and fifty Years, or thereabouts. Now every one of these struck more and more Light into this most important Mystery; and, by the same Proportions, confirmed Mens Minds in the Expectation of a Saviour, and gave the Marks, by which they might know him from any false Pretender to that Character. By so gentle, so slow degrees, was the Dawning of those Ages brought forward. A Dawning of Three thousand and almost six hundred Years; And, even at the Determination of this long Period, nay and Four hundred Years after that, it was no better than a Dawning still. For all this while the Sun of Righteousness darted his rising Beams, through a Cloud of Types and Ceremonies; and did not shine in broad and perfect Day, till the Shadows and Figures of the Levitical Institution gave Place to the Simplicity of that better Service, which taught Men to *worship God in Spirit and in Truth*. And in this regard too the Progress was gradual. For, as the Fulness of Time drew nearer, the Duties of the Moral Law were more diligently inculcated, and the Substance and Spiritual Meaning of the Ceremonies more fully explained. So that herein consisted a great part of the Prophetick Office, to correct the grossness of Superstitious and Carnal Minds, who looked no deeper than the outward Ordinance; and, laying all the Stress there, never answered the Intent of those Commands, which they all the while vainly imagined themselves the most punctual Performers of.

Again, As the Measure, so likewise the Way, in which God discovered himself heretofore, is very different from that made use of under the Gospel. For this was the Apostle's Meaning, when saying, that this was

done in times past, as at sundry times, so in divers manners too. Whereby, we have reason to believe, he had regard to the Dreams, the Visions, the Voices, the Thunders, the Appearances of Angels, the bright Clouds, the Mercy-Seat, and the many other Circumstances, which the History of the Old Testament relates the Revelations of those Times to have been attended with. And besides these, the dark Parables, the intricate Figures, the sudden Raptures, the Ecstasies, the general Disorder of Nature, and the sealing up of the Senses, of which *Abraham*, and *Samuel*, and *Jeremiah*, and *Daniel*, and sundry others, are famous Instances. I might

say, All the other Prophets, One excepted: * Numb. xii. 8. For * so that Passage of God's *talking with Moses Face to Face, as a Man talketh with his Friend*, is generally understood; that He alone, of all Mankind, was not subject to the Consternations, and violent Impressions, usual upon such Occasions. So that, be the particular Form of the Revelation what it would, still Every sort affected the Party receiving it, with some very remarkable Alteration, both in Body and Mind.

2. Now the manifest Advantage of the *Christian*, above these antecedent Dispensations must, according to the Force of the foregoing Argument, consist in the Fulness of the Discovery, and in the free and familiar Manner of imparting it. Both which I take to be intimated here, in that very significant Title, given to the Gospel-Age, when called by the Apostle *these last Days*. They, who are at all acquainted with the Jewish Forms of Speech, know very well, that no Expressions are more frequent with them, than the *latter Days, the last Times, the World to come*, and the like; And, that their Interpreters do generally understand the Scriptures, where * such Expressions occur, of the Coming and Kingdom of the Messiah. The Reason is, because they look'd upon this, as the great Revolution, which

* So Gen. xlix. 1.
Numb. xxiv.

14-
Isai. ii. 2.
Mic. iv. 1.
Dan. ii. 28.

which should continue for ever unchangeable. That, wherein all their Hopes and Expectations ought to center, as the Completion of all the Designs of Providence. And thus the several States, whether of their own Nation and Church in particular, or of Mankind in general, were not only antecedent, but even subordinate, to it. The Happiness of that Time, as it is frequently set forth, by other Marks of Peace, and Plenty, and all Manner of Worldly Affluence and Success; so is it particularly extolled, for the Perfection of those Spiritual Advantages, then to be most liberally communicated to the World.

Then it was, that no Man should need * to teach his Neighbour or his Brother, for they should all be taught of God, and every one should know him from the least unto the greatest; Then, that the Mountain † of the Lord's House shall be established upon the top of the Mountains, and all Nations should flow into it; Then, that the Earth should be filled with the Knowledge * of the Glory of the Lord, as the Waters

* Isai. liv. 13.

Jer. xxxi. 34.

† Isai. ii. 2.

Mic. iv. 4.

* Hab. ii. 14.

cover the Sea. All which, and other glorious Characters, as we see in part brought to pass long ago, by enlarging the Messiah's Dominion, over the many and distant Countries, where his Doctrine hath been received: So have we reason to embrace those Gradual Advances of his Kingdom in Mens Hearts, as so many Earnests, and undoubted Pledges, of that absolute and unbounded Conquest he shall make over Ignorance and Error, when the Season of exerting his Grace more plentifully shall come, and effectually prepare, as well as proclaim, the nearer Approaches of his Kingdom of Glory. And, though this Season be one of those, which the Father hath put in his own Power; yet, be the Distance from us what it will, it is sufficient, that these are all the Days of the Messiah, to denominate them *the last Days*. That Phrase by no means necessarily importing the speedy End of this Material World; but only, that, how long soever God

God shall suffer it to endure, he hath no subsequent Dispensation in reserve. In a word, He hath fixed the Christian, for that Doctrine, and Service, and Trial, by which Mankind are to express their Obedience to him, so long as there shall continue to be any State of Discipline, or Obedience at all.

In the mean while, had not this been so distinctly foretold, yet Reason might abundantly convince Men, that, what Days soever were in this Sense *the last*, the clearest and fullest Discoveries of God and his Will, are a Privilege, certainly belonging to them. For the Notion of a Being absolutely perfect will naturally lead us to conclude, that no Design or Work of such a Being shall be suffered to want its due perfection. If therefore the revealing himself to Mankind, in any Degree at all, be an Action worthy of such a Being; the same Goodness, which disposed him to this, cannot but dispose him to do it in such Degrees, as are necessary for all the Purposes, which that Revelation was intended to serve. And, if this were not done, in all the fulness designed, by the First Discoveries; This is an Argument, that there is some future and larger Discovery in reserve, by which the defects of those Former shall be effectually supplied. So again, If God, for Causes known to his Infinite Wisdom, have thought fit to accommodate different Dispensations, to different Times and Places; we have Reason to look upon Each of these in its Order, as a nearer Approach to Perfection; and upon the Final One, as That, which hath all to recommend and enforce it, which can be necessary, or ought to be, expected. For infinite Wisdom cannot change but for the better; And therefore, when it declares it self unchangeably fixed, in any Method of promoting its own Glory, and the Good of its Creatures; We may, I think, safely depend upon it, not only that this last Choice is preferable to all that went before; but that there cannot be another better. And that, upon this very Account, because God hath determined, there shall not be any other after it.

As

V. I. *commonly called* CHRISTMAS-DAY. 155

As therefore it was an Honour due to the Days of the Messiah, that they should be the *last* Days; so it is certainly a Mercy to be highly esteemed, and acknowledged with all imaginable Thankfulness, that Almighty God hath reserved us to these Days. To a Season of the brightest Light; Not the Glimmerings of Feeble Reason uninstructed by Divine Revelation; Not the distant Prospects of a rising Sun, refracted upon us through thick Clouds of Figures and Ceremonies, but the clear Shine of Truth and Righteousness: Not a Season, in which it was impossible, even for the best disposed Minds, to arrive at those Measures of spiritual Knowledge, which every Man sincerely disposed to know, may now without great difficulty attain to; But That, in which this Apostle's Observation is in this respect true also, that we are Persons, for *whom God hath provided better things*, that so, even the faithfullest and most excellent of his Servants heretofore, *should not however without us be made perfect*.

The like Advantage may this Doctrine boast of, above all that went before, with regard to the *Manner* of imparting it to the World. It was not proclaimed in Thunder and Lightning, in Flames of Fire, and Clouds of Smoak, like the Law in Mount *Sinai*. It was not enforced by Miracles of Vengeance and Terror, such as might establish its Authority upon the slavish Principle of Fear. Nor were its Mysteries communicated, by any Infusions of the Spirit, so fierce and over-bearing, as to create any Disturbance of Reason, any Agonies of Body, or Alienation of Mind, in the Parties receiving them. But this whole Matter was transacted, by the most easy and familiar Methods, and with all possible Marks of Kindness and Condescension. A Master gentle and lowly, stooping to the Capacities of the meanest, not disdaining the Conversation of the vilest, provided they were vile in their own Eyes, and applied to him for Instruction and Amendment. Confirming the Truth of what he

2

taught

taught, by Wonders of Mercy and Love ; such as had a natural Tendency to win, rather than affright Men ; to engage the Affections, at the same time they convince the Judgment ; and void of all Constraint, except that soft and welcome, and in all reason that strongest and least resistible of any, the Force of Ingenuity and Gratitude, of Goodness unexampled, and Benefits never to be requited, never acknowledged, as they deserve. Doctrines, inculcated with all the Freedom of a Three Years intimate Acquaintance, and afterwards by the immediate and plentiful Inspirations of the Spirit of God himself ; propagated by the Gift of Tongues, by which their first Teachers were enabled, without Art or Study, to address themselves readily to Hearers of different Nations and Languages ; Delivered with all possible Simplicity, and Plainness of Expression ; Urged with the weightiest and most proper Arguments ; And faithfully recorded, for the Benefit of succeeding Ages, by Men, assisted by the same Spirit, so as to secure them from all Danger of Falshood or Mistake ; and, upon every Occasion, so acted from Above, as both to speak and write, the Words of Soberness, as well as Truth. So different is the Case of Christians, who live under a Revelation, Easy and clear, in all necessary Points of Faith and Practice, Full and express in Matters essential to Salvation, from Theirs, whose Service was a *Figure of good Things to come*, whose Light was darted thro' a Cloud, and mingled with Shadows ; and whose brightest Discoveries were wrapped up in dark and enigmatical Phrases, proper to the Prophe-tick Stile. The one was a sealed Book, to be unlocked by future Events ; the Other, a plain Relation of those Events already brought to pass. The One proposed a Happiness in prospect and desire, the Other contained Promises accomplished, and that long expected Happiness now in actual Possession. Such and so many, more indeed and nobler than the Limits of this Discourse, and the Greatness of the Subject, will allow to be repre-

sented in their just Proportions are the Prerogatives of this Dispensation. And yet even all that is already, and all that might be said upon my *First*, comes infinitely short of that Pre-eminence, which makes my

II. *Second Head*: The Excellence, I mean, of that Person, by whom this Revelation was imparted to us. For there the Apostle evidently lays his main Strefs; God spake in Times past to our Fathers *by the Prophets*, but to *Us* in these last Days he hath spoken *by his Son*.

Now the Design of this Place is to prove the Dignity of this last Messenger, to be so far superior to that of any other, as to admit of no Likeness, no Comparison between them: That he hath Excellencies peculiar to himself, and such as are communicable, not only to none, no not to the best of the Sons of Men; but to none, no not the noblest Creatures, of any other Kind. In a Word, that he is of a nature truly Divine, of the same Essence and Eternity with God the Father, and his Son in a Manner and Sense so proper and particular, as no other, however called such in Scripture, is, or must be understood to be.

Now since the Majesty of an Infinite God must needs be too vast, not only for any Words, but even for the most extended Thought, of a Comprehension, so narrow as Ours; Great care must be taken, in the expounding of Scripture, not to insist too rigorously upon those Images and Representations, which are made use of there, to rectify our Notions of things so far above us. For These in truth are used, not because they express the Matter fully and in all its parts, but because we are not capable of better. And again, since One and the same Image will not suffice, to represent all that is necessary for us to believe; there is a necessity of doing it by Several. And therefore we must be sure to observe, for what Purpose Each of These is made choice of; and content our selves with applying it to that particular

ticular Difficulty, which it was brought to illustrate. Otherwise if it be stretched beyond its Line, we may give Occasion to perverse and dangerous Consequences: And make That, which should be a Guard against Errors and Heresies, a Foundation for strange Inferences and Opinions, to which the Author never meant it should extend. These necessary Cautions being thus premised, I shall very briefly set before you the Arguments for the Divinity of our Blessed Saviour, contained in the Passage now under Consideration.

The *First* is, that God hath appointed him *Heir of all things*. By which, no doubt, we are to understand that universal Dominion, mentioned in other Texts,

Acts v. 31.
ii. 36. x. 36.
Rom. xiv. 9.
1 Cor. xv. 25, 26.
Mat. xxviii. 18.
1 Pet. iii. 22.

which call him a *Prince and a Saviour, Lord and Christ, Lord both of the Dead and Living, Lord of all*; which speak of his *subduing all Enemies*, even Death itself, having *all things put under his Feet*, all *Power in Heaven and Earth given unto*

him, being gone into Heaven, and sitting down on the right hand of God, *Angels and Authorities and Powers being made subject unto him*. A Government, of which, as God, he stood possess'd from all Eternity: A Government, which however his Human Nature might have hereditary Title to, by Virtue, and so from the very Instant, of its Personal Union with the Divine; yet was he not, as God and Man both, actually invested with it, till after, and by way of

See Ver. 8.
Phil. ii. 6, 11.

Compensation for, his Death and Sufferings. But a Government withal, which,

were not he very God, as well as very Man, it is not to be conceived, how he could be qualified to exercise. There being in the Reason of the Thing, no manner of Inducement to persuade us, that any Power and Wisdom, less than that which could create all things, can be sufficient to govern all things. And therefore no Method of arguing could be imagin'd more regular or

con-

conclusive, than this of the Apostle: Which proceeds to shew in the

Second Place, That the Person, by whom God now rules the Worlds, is the same, by whom he *made the Worlds*. Those very *Worlds*, no doubt, which this Epistle, by the same Expression, reckons it, as the first Instance of Faith, for us to *understand, that* ^{Heb. xi. 3.} *they were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear.* Consequently, the Creation attributed here to the Son, is not any Spiritual or Figurative, but a Proper and Material One. Had the former only belonged to him, this had been no peculiar Excellence; for the Gospel-State, consisting of the making Men New Creatures, is in part the Work of every Planter of the Gospel. So that the *Worlds* in this Sense, are what Christ's Disciples, at least what Christ by his Disciples, made. And yet we never find, even the most distant Intimations, of the Son ever making the World in such a Manner, as to have any Creature a Partner in the Performance. Not only so, but the Scriptures, instead of countenancing, directly overthrow this fond Imagination. For, whereas this metaphorical Creation, or renewing the World unto Righteousness, could concern Mankind alone; the Son is declared to be the Maker of many things, which never had a part in any, but a Proper and Material, Creation. *For by Him* ^{Colof. i. 16.} *were all things created that are in Heaven, and that are in Earth, visible and invisible, whether they be Thrones or Dominions, or Principalities or Powers, all things were created by him and for him.*

Those last Words do likewise effectually refute another Error, advanced upon this Occasion. By which it is pretended, that Almighty God, in making the World, made use of the Son's Co-operation, in the Quality of a Servant, or Instrument only. For upon these Terms, how true soever it might be, that *all things were created by him,*

him, yet could it not possibly be true, that all things *were created for him* too. Nor is it to be supposed, that any Holy Man, speaking by Divine Inspiration, should address himself to any Person, acting in an inferior Capacity, as the Psalmist hath done in a Passage *Ver. 10, 11, 12.* quoted here, *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the Foundations of the Earth, and the Heavens are the Work of thy Hands; They shall perish, but thou endurest; and they all shall wax old as doth a Garment; and as a Vesture shalt thou fold them up, and They shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy Years shall not fail.* So natural is the Inference from hence also, that the Son (as was hinted before) therefore rules the World, because he made the World; That he was in such a Sense and Manner the Maker, as to be likewise the Proprietor, and rightful Lord, of it. And consequently, that he acts, not in Subordination to any Higher Being, but in Assertion of his own Prerogative, by maintaining and governing his own World.

This is yet farther confirmed, by that Description of him in the next Words, that he is the *Brightness of his Father's Glory*, and the *express Image of his Person*. Upon which, not to philosophize with too bold a Niceness, let it suffice to say, that the former of these Characters (alluding to a Luminous Body, and comparing the Father to the Original Fountain of Light, and the Son to the Effulgence or Ray streaming from it) seems intended to teach us, that the Essence of both is the same; that the One is inseparable from, and not to be conceived without, the Other; Consequently, that Neither of them either ever was, or could be, alone. So that the Son is hereby declared, to be of the same Nature and Eternity with the Father, and from hence, more particularly, the Church seems to have taken the Occasion of confessing, in Opposition to the *Arian Heresy*, as we find it done in one of our Creeds, that *Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God, was begotten*

begotten of his Father before all Worlds, that he is God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Of One Substance with the Father, By whom all things were made.

But, lest so full a Declaration of this Unity of Substance might be unwarily, or perversely, made a Foundation, for inferring from thence an Unity in all other respects whatsoever; the Latter of these Characters resembles him to an Image, or Impress, of his Father's Excellencies. Now, since, in all created Beings, the thing which makes, and that which receives, the Impression, hath each a distinct Subsistence of its own; so is it also in the Case before us. Not so indeed, as in created Beings, where these Two things differ in Nature and Substance also; but so far thus, as can consist with the Character given just before. Which, having affirmed the Nature and Duration of these Two to be exactly the same, must needs forbid us, from this other Character, to draw any Consequences destructive of, or any way disagreeable to, the Former. And therefore, having already established the Unity of Nature, in the Similitude of Original and Derived Light; the Apostle might safely make use of another Similitude, which (following after, and taken in Conjunction with That) could not possibly extend farther, than to a Distinction of Person. And thus he hath likewise obviated the Heresy of *Sabellius*; by affirming the Father and Son to have the same Godhead, Glory, and Majesty; but at the same time intimating, that they have not the same Personality. In a Word, that though the Father and the Son be One God, and in that respect there be no difference in Nature, or Time, or Degree; yet the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father. And, in this respect, there is a just, and very material, Distinction of Order, and Dignity, mutual Relation, and manner of Subsisting.

There is indeed another Reason for these Expressions, with regard to Us. And they belong most strictly to our

M

Blessed

Blessed Saviour ; Not only, as he is of the same Divine Nature and Glory with the Father ; But, as by Him the Excellencies of that Nature and Glory are most clearly manifested to the World. For never were the Wisdom, the Power, the Holiness, the Justice, and, above all, the Goodness of God, so conspicuous, as in the Preaching, the Miracles, the Life and Death, the Resurrection and Exaltation, of the Adorable Jesus. So that St. *John* had reason to say, in Allusion to the Marks of God's special Presence in the Jewish Tabernacle and

John i. 14.

Temple, *We beheld the Glory of the Word made Flesh, the Glory as of the Only begotten of the Father ;* and St. *Paul*, that God, who commanded the Light to shine out of Darkeness, hath shined into

2 Cor. iv. 6.

our Hearts, to give the Light of the Knowledge of the Glory of God, in the Face (or Person) of *Jesus Christ*. But still this is such a Glory, as could not have shined upon us, had it not been the same with that of the Father ; and This is therefore the Effect of our Lord's Divine, but could not possibly proceed from his Human, Nature.

As little is it to be conceived, that to this Human Nature, and no other, should be ascribed that governing and preserving Providence, attributed to the Son, in those next Words, that he *upholdeth all things by the Word of his Power*. Surely no Being, less than that which made the World, is capable of sustaining and continuing the Order of the World. And therefore, though this be now done by the Son, who is Man as well as God ; yet is it, truly and properly, the Work of that Divine Nature, which was from all Eternity at the right Hand of the Father : Not of that Human Nature, which, being united to, and from thenceforth inseparable from the Divine, is now together with it exalted thither. And this Exaltation is here spoken of, as a Reward of those Sufferings, and of that expiatory Sacrifice for the Sins of Mankind, which that Union

with

V. I. *commonly called* CHRISTMAS-DAY. 163

with the Divine rendred of Merit as invaluable, as the Condescension of it is inexpressible.

One Argument more the Apostle here makes use of, to prove the Excellence of this Author of the New Covenant ; And that is, The manifest Precedence, given to Him in the *Old Testament*, above the most glorious of all Created Beings, the blessed Angels. The Proof hereof consists in sundry Passages, acknowledged, by Jewish Authors themselves, to belong to the Messias ; *Ver. 5.* who is, in a Sense and Manner peculiar to himself, entitled the *Son of God* ; while the Angels are allowed no higher a Denomination, than that of Ministers and Servants of God. Nay, and to shew *Ver. 6, 7.* the mighty distance and disparity between them, those very Angels are, all of them, commanded to *worship* this Son. A Homage, to which nothing less could give him Right, than His being their Creator, and They his Creatures. At other times we find him represented, as a righteous King, possessed of an everlasting Dominion, and invested with such distinguishing Honours ; as none, even the Highest and most peculiar Favourites of Heaven, were, or may ever hope to be dignified with. And once more, Not only the Creation of the World, but the Dissolution of it also, is expressly declared to be His Doing. *Ver. 10. to the end of the Chapter.* Mean while the utmost attributed to the Angels, amounts to no more, than their being Instruments in the Hand of God. Performers of such good Offices, to those who love and serve him, as He, who hath constituted the Services of all his Creatures in a wonderful Order, hath thought fit to assign them in the Protection of good Men, and in the Government of the World.

Now these were Arguments very fit to be used to the *Hebrews* in particular ; Because the Jews, from whose Religion they had lately been converted, appear to have borne a greater Reverence, and to have ascribed much

more, to the Angels, in the making of the World particularly ; than their Scriptures had any where given them warrant to do. They had *received* their *Law*, as St. Stephen expresses it, *by the Disposition of Angels* ;
 Acts vii. 53. Their Fathers were conducted by them from *Egypt* to the promised Land ; They had been blessed with many signal Deliverances by their Interposition ; They had been favoured with many Visions, and Revelations of great Importance, by these Messengers ; They had the Oracles of God, and his special Presence exhibited to them, upon extraordinary Emergencies, by Spirits appearing in this Form. What then could be more seasonably urged, upon Persons of such Principles and Privileges, in Honour of the Christian Dispensation ; than a Proof, that its Author was, not only superior to the Angels, but infinitely their Superior ? So that the Excellence even of those noble Beings, above the very Vilest, is not to be named with that of Christ above Them. In one Case, the Difference is only in Place and Degree. Some are in higher, some in lower Stations, but still all Fellow-Servants and Fellow-Creatures. In the other we have no Foundation for so much as a Comparison ; but Servants and their Lord, Creatures and Creator, the humblest Adoration, and the most absolute Dominion. So distant are the Dispensers of these Two Revelations ; and consequently so small, even none at all, is the Glory of the Former, when set against the Latter, which, in this respect, excelleth all Others in Glory.

The Result then of my Second Head is this. *That* the Gospel claims a just Pre-eminence above any other Revelation of God's Will to Mankind ; Because, not only the First and remote Declarer, but the immediate Publisher and Dispenser of it, was a Person truly and strictly Divine. So that, when God spoke to our Forefathers by the Prophets, it was by Men, who in all Points (their particular Inspiration excepted) stood upon the level with those they spoke to. But when he spoke to Us by
 his

V. I. *commonly called* CHRISTMAS-DAY. 165

his Son, he spoke by himself, and without the Ceremony of an inferior Messenger. An Honour and Advantage This to Us; A Kindness and Condescension in Him, which at all times deserves to be considered: But, at this Festival especially, should be remembred, with the most zealous Expressions of Wonder and Praise. And, for the more effectual exciting these Affections in our Minds, I did propose to leave the Two Heads, already treated of, with some Reflections, suitable to the Solemnity of the Day, and the Substance of this *Epistle*. But, this Discourse having already exceeded its just Measure, and the *Gospel* furnishing Matter, to which they will be no less applicable, I rather choose to reserve them for the close of the Whole, and offer them there entire; than to divide such Meditations, between Two Passages of Scripture, which seem to have each a fair, if not an equal, Title to them.

The G O S P E L.

St. John i. 1. to 15.

P A R A P H R A S E.

IN the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

generality of the Jews, and many Heathens of that and former Ages, to denote a Divine Person) had a Being; and did exist inseparably with God, yea and was himself literally and truly God.

1. Before Time or the World was, the *Word* (a Title understood by the

2. *The same was in the beginning with God.*

head, but because he did from all Eternity exist in and from another Person in this Godhead, therefore it is, that I affirm him to have been so with God, that there was never any Time, in which God was, and the Word was not.

3. *All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.*

Author of Being to all things else; so that, whatever in Heaven or in Earth, visible or invisible, is or ever was, which is not God; this Word was, in the strictest and properest Sense of that Expression, the Maker and Creator of it.

2. Yet was not this Person the whole God-

3. Nor did he only never begin to be himself, but he was the Cause and

4. *In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men.*

4. All things indeed subsist and live by Him, but Mankind do so in the

the most excellent Sense and Manner. For to Them he is the Author of eternal Life. And the Discovery of, and Way to This, is the true, the best, and only valuable Knowledge, with which the Minds of Men are enlightened.

5. A Light communicated to an ignorant and wicked World, but their Minds are so darkened with Prejudices and Passions, that they refuse, and are never the better for it.

5. And the Light shineth in Darknes, and the Darknes comprehended it not.

6. Not that there was any want of Evidence, had they been rightly disposed to receive it. For he had the Testimony of John Baptist in particular, whose Authority could not be denied to proceed from God.

6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7. And yet the very end he was sent for, is no other, than to testify, that this Person was He, in whom Men ought to believe, and to prepare them for doing so.

7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8. 'Tis evident from the whole Course of John's Ministry, that he was not, or ever pretended to be, that Teacher, upon whose Doctrine Men were to depend for eternal Salvation. No, his Business was to declare and lead People to him.

8. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9. And therefore they who value themselves most upon being John's Disciples, must know, that whatever Advantages of this kind any Man ever did or can attain to, are all to be had from Him, whom John witnessed to, and from Him only.

9. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10. And such Advantages Men never wanted some Measures of, and Opportunities for; in regard that there were always some visible Footsteps of his Providence and Grace in this his own World; but these the generality of Mankind attended not to, though created, and preserved, and governed by him.

10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11. Nay, which is yet a more lamentable Instance of Perverseness and Stupidity, even the Jews, a People favoured with particular Revelations of his Will, and made his Peculiar, did yet reject him, when he came and conversed among, and applied himself more especially to, them.

11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12. All did not thus refuse him indeed, and they who received him, (by which is meant the Belief of, and Obedience to his Doctrine) found their Account in it. For on all such he bestowed that most valuable Privilege of being the Children of God.

12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name.

13. Which

V. I. commonly called CHRISTMAS-DAY. 167

13. *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

13. A Relation founded, not in any natural Descent, like those which are contracted by material Principles conveyed, and sensual Inclination gratified; Or, (as others) not in the Blood shed at Circumcision, and a ritual Law; Nor in the Vertue of any thing Men can do, by improving their natural Reason, and living up to its best Principles; But wholly owing to God, whose Mercy, for the sake of this *Word*, adopts us as his own, and by the Grace of his Holy Spirit, begets us to a new and better Life, and draws us to a Likeness of himself. The Method of conferring which Privilege is no less wonderful, than the Privilege it self.

14. *And the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.*

14. This Divine Person, the *Word*, of whom I have hitherto been speaking, the more effectually to impart these Blessings to the World, took the Human into his Divine Nature; became mortal Man, and conversed among us. The Perfections of God in the mean while residing in, and shining forth, out of this Tabernacle of his Flesh, as evidently, as ever the Presence of God was manifest from the Ark heretofore. (Inasmuch, that no Person less than the only Son of God, of the same Nature with his Father, could do what he did.) His Glory indeed far excelled that other, as exhibiting to us far greater Mercies, than the Levitical Dispensation. Such were, Pardon in full for all evil Things, from which Men could not be justified by the Law: And the Substance of those good Things, of which that Law had only the Types and Shadows.

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this Festival pursues the same Design with the Epistle, by leading us to infer the Excellence of the Christian Dispensation, from that of its Author. And, as there he was represented by the *Brightness of God's Glory*, and *the express Image of his Person*: So is he here, by the *Word* of God, the necessary Emanation, the exact Image of the Divine Mind, and the *Light*, which from that Source of all Light, is by Him reflected upon Men. There he was stiled the *Maker of the Worlds*, and the *Upholder of all things by the Word of his Power*: Here it is declared, that he *made all things*, and that *in Him*, in Him alone is *Life*. Only, whereas the Author to the *Hebrews* contents himself, with shewing, that the Person, by whom God *hath spoken to us in these last Days* is his own Son, of the same Divine Nature and Perfections with himself;

St. *John* does treat this Subject more fully, by shewing, that this Person, of the same Nature with the Father, hath not disdained to be made of the same Nature with Us too.

And this is the true Intent of St. *John*, in the Portion of Scripture now before us. It is not, to prove the *Word* a Person, no nor a Divine Person, no nor yet the Maker of all things; These were Notions very familiar to the *Jews*; As is plain from the *Chaldee* Paraphrasts, which, in those Ages, were the Scriptures, read in their Synagogues publickly. Nor was it necessary for the Gentiles to be told this; Many of whose Philosophers had mentioned the *Λόγος* or *Word*, as inseparable from the Deity, and the Cause and Artificer of all things. So that thus far the Evangelist neither expressed himself in any uncouth Terms, nor affirmed any thing new. But that, which lay upon him to prove, for the Instruction and Conviction of both these sorts of Men, was, that this Divine *Word* did come into the World; did converse among and enlighten Mankind, with those Discoveries of Truth and Salvation, contained in the Gospel, and did do, and suffer, all those wondrous things related there at large, in the Person of our Redeemer. And the making this good was the proper, the only Course, for answering the main End of writing this Gospel. That End, we are told, was to confute the Errors of *Cerintbus*, and such other Hereticks, as held our Blessed Saviour to be a mere Man, but denied his Divinity, and Existence, before his being born of his Mother, and appearing in the World.

A Doctrine, effectually overthrown, by proving the *Word*, which had a Being from all Eternity, and made all things, and consequently was very God, to be the same, that afterwards dwelt in Human Flesh, and which from thenceforth existed no longer as a Divine Person, separate and alone, but as God and Man both, known by the Name and Character of Jesus Christ. The Truth of whose Divinity having been, I hope, sufficiently cleared

cleared in my Last Discourse, I shall only take notice now of some few Particulars, which did not fall within the Compass of the Epistle for this Day; and then proceed to such Reflections, as both That, and my present Subject, suggest to us.

And *First*, We have here an Account, from whence Mankind received all that Prerogative of Reason and Knowledge, by which they are distinguished from, and advanced above, the inanimate and brute parts of the Creation. Those Notices of God, of Good and Evil, of their Duty in This, and their Existence in a Future State, and whatever else it is, wherein the primitive Brightness of Man's Understanding, and the Rectitude of his Will consisted, All were derived from this Word, the Fountain of Life. So that to Him we stand indebted, for all the Natural, as well as supernatural Wisdom, we ever were possessed or capable of. All was a Ray darted upon the Soul by this *Brightness of his Father's Glory*: All an Impression of this *Image of his Person*, stamped upon a Creature formed after his own Likeness: And all this, with the greatest Propriety, stiled the *Life and Light of Men*, because such Knowledge is the Guide to, the Ground of Immortality: The very thing, by which our Souls subsist, or can attain to the Happiness prepared for them, as the proper and ultimate End of their Creation.

2. In the Next place we may observe the Operations of this Divine *Word*, in Man's depraved State; described by a *Light shining in Darkeness*, and the *Darkness not comprehending it*, by *being in the World*, and the *World not knowing even Him by whom it was made*. Whereby we are given to understand, both the Misery of that State, and the Cause of it. The Former is intimated in the Word *Darkness*, the Latter in the *Light not being comprehended by that Darkness*. From both which put together, we are led to conclude, that, even in the most benighted Ages of the World, this Sun of Righteousness did not cease to shine; And, if the Effect of that Shining

were so wofully small, as in some Places and Times it must, (to the great Reproach of Human Nature) be confessed to have been ; the Reason is, because the Light he shed was broken, and shut out, by the Follies or the Vices, that thick impenetrable Night, which Men had, by Neglect of God first, and then by Industry, and Custom in evil-doing, made about their own Minds. And this is what Men not only might do then, but may even now, or at any time, do, by searing their Consciences, stupifying their Senses, blinding their Eyes, and sinning away their very first Principles, all Regard for, all Distinction between, Moral Good and Evil. In the meanwhile this Divine Word was, in all Ages, and under every Dispensation, shedding his Light, in such Measures, and by such Methods, as his own Infinite Wisdom saw expedient. He was the Source of all that Light Men at any time enjoyed, to guide themselves in the way to Immortality by ; Of all that which they did, and of all that too, which either through their Weakness, or their Wilfulness, they did not, receive.

3. How great a part this Last Cause had in the Common Calamity and Corruption of Mankind, is very evident from the *Tenth* and *Eleventh* Verses. The Former observes so wretched a Degeneracy, as kept the World in Ignorance of the very Author of their Being, by not attending to those visible Footsteps of a Divine Power and Providence, of which a moderate Consideration of Natural Causes and Effects, and the Order and Government of the Universe, was capable of preserving a constant and reverent Sense. The latter exposes the particular Disingenuity of that unpersuadable People, to whom this *Word* made nearer Approaches of Kindness and more liberal Communications of himself and his Will, than to any other. And all this, to little other Effect, than to render the Guilt and Ingratitude of being shamefully repulsed by Them, who ought to have been most forward to entertain him, so much the more notorious and inexcusable.

cusable. From all which taken together, the Account given here, what this Divine *Word* is in his own Nature, What he was, and how he exhibited himself to Mankind in their first Estate; What, to the generality of them in their fallen Condition, and what, to the Jewish Nation in particular; we are abundantly instructed, where to lay the Blame of their Wickedness; and how it came to pass, that no larger Improvements were made, of all the Advantages and Opportunities of knowing and doing better: *viz.* The *Word* and his *Light* were always present with them; but they who might, yet did not, would not, see and walk by it: And, even when this *Light* shone brightest, and this *Word* conversed most familiarly among Men; it was not a Favour wholly new, but only a different and clearer Manifestation of Himself. This Degree and Manner of it was indeed reserved for that and after Ages, who were taught by the Word Incarnate; But the Word, though not Incarnate, was a Teacher common to every Age. And consequently, it was *always the Condemnation* that *Men loved Darknes rather than Light*; though the Times of the Gospel, after this *Word* being made *Flesh*, have this peculiar Aggravation of their Crimes, that the Evil of their Deeds is an Opposition against the strongest Light; And so their Love and Preference of Darknes is more affected and obstinate, than that of Any, who had gone before them.

4. In the mean while, there wanted no Encouragement to Mens better Behaviour in this respect. Quite contrary. The Terms, on which he offered his Guidance, were such, that They who refused Him, refused their own highest Honour and Happiness. For, *as many as received him, to them gave he Power to become the Sons of God.* What Honour, what Happiness can be comparable to that of being the Sons of God? Related, in so near and tender a Capacity, to a Father so Powerful, so Holy, so Wise, so Good; that it is not possible for the Wants;
or

or even the Wishes, of any Child of His, to extend to any Measure of things necessary or profitable, which will not find it self fully answered, infinitely exceeded, both by his Ability, and his Inclination, to supply them? And therefore, when we have stretched our Thoughts to the utmost length, in representing the Greatness of this Privilege; they will at last be forced to stop so far short of its Dignity, that the most becoming way of Contemplating the Goodness of this Father, and the Felicity of these Children, will be, to sit down full of Thanks and Wonder; and to cry out with St. *John*, *Behold what*

1 John iii. 1.

manner of Love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God!

5. And yet we shall perhaps find cause to abate of our Wonder, that this inestimable Privilege should not, that any thing indeed should be, thought too much for us; after that still more amazing Miracle of Mercy, which this Scripture propounds, in the Last Place, to our Consideration: *The Word being made Flesh, and dwelling among us, and manifesting forth his Glory, the Glory as of the only begotten of the Father, &c.* Than which Account, as none can in Reason be desired more expressive of this *Word* subsisting, really and actually, in our Human Substance and Form; so it is admirable to observe the *Decorum* of the Apostle's Stile, upon that Occasion, and how it is suited to the Majesty of the Person that did so. For, having spoken all along of the *Word*, as Eternal and truly Divine: And coming now to speak of his Existing, in a different manner from what he had done heretofore; to take off all Suspicion of his being degraded by that Condescension, he makes use all along of Phrases, well known to the Jews, and such as plainly allude to those Appearances under the Old Testament, which they acknowledged to belong to the true God only. These therefore are Intimations, that the same Divinity, which then filled Their Tabernacle and Ark of the Testimony, had now chosen a Human Body for his Tabernacle.

bernacle. And, as he then exhibited himself to their Fathers, by a shining Glory, and other miraculous Tokens of his Presence; So was this same Presence rendered sufficiently conspicuous in this other Tabernacle, by such distinguishing Characters, and wonderful Operations, as proved the Person bearing, and doing, them to be truly Divine. Here then is the Subject of Astonishment, never to be sufficiently admired and adored; not only that we should be exalted to be the Children of God, but that the Son of God should vouchsafe to become the Son of Man, thereby to make Us the Sons of God. Here the Foundation of our Faith is a Privilege, which otherwise it had been the highest Presumption to entertain a Thought of, had not He united Our Nature inseparably to his Own; and, by taking part with the Adopted, admitted Them to a Part with the Only Begotten.

Thus much shall suffice for the Observations, intended to be raised from this Scripture. It only remains now, that the Whole be concluded with some Reflections, proper to the Subject, and the Solemnity of this Day.

1. And *First*, To begin, where the Epistle for this Festival does, with the Advantage of being *spoken to*, or taught by the Son of God, above that allowed to those Ages heretofore, who were instructed by his Prophets. This may appear in fundry, but Particularly in these following, Respects.

(1.) In the Sufficiency and Qualifications of Our Teacher, superior to those of any other Person, at any time delegated to this Office. This is what S. *John* hath observed, in those very remarkable Texts to this Purpose, *No Man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* And again, *He whom God hath sent speaketh the Words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.* To which we may add a
John i. 18.
iii. 34.
 Third,

Third, delivered by our Blessed Saviour concerning himself, *No Man hath ascended up into Heaven, but He that came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven.* The most exquisite Happiness Mankind are designed for, or capable of, consists in a Resemblance first, and then an Enjoyment, of God. But it is necessary first to know the Excellencies of that Object, we labour to resemble. This, when God is our Object, is what no Strength of our own Faculties can enable us to do. For he dwells in *Light and Glory inaccessible*; and therefore all the Approaches we make towards Him, are owing to those Communications, he is graciously pleased to make of himself to Us. The Persons he makes use of, as his Instruments to this Purpose, can impart to Others, only in such Proportions, as he had imparted to Them. And All his Distributions of this kind to any mere Man, as they are limited by other Reasons and Ends, best known to his own Wisdom; so must they, in the Nature of the thing, be bounded by the Capacity of the Receiver. Now This, in the very noblest and most comprehensive of Created Beings, must be infinitely too narrow to take in the Perfections of God, as they are. For this is the Peculiar Advantage of the Son of God, that he is in *his Father's Bosom, sees him as he is*, hath the *fulness of the Spirit in himself*, is the *Wisdom and Word of the Father*, Inseparable from him; And therefore, even then, when he came down to teach and converse with Men upon Earth, was still in Heaven, the same God continuing there, while manifested in the Flesh as Man here. This then is our Security; that, as Knowledge is the very Life of the Soul, the Seed of Immortality and Bliss in us, we are provided with a Teacher, whose Abilities are above any Defect. And if good Care be taken, not to be wanting to our own Improvement; we cannot fail of becoming *wise unto Salvation*, when enjoying the Benefit of being Instructed by that Teacher, who is at

once the Perfection, and the Fountain, of all Wisdom.

2. By means of such a Teacher we have an effectual Prevention against Two very great, and very common Inconveniencies, proceeding from Two the most distant Affections of Mind, towards our Spiritual Guides.

(1.) The One is, Having their Persons and Parts in undue Admiration. This gives mistaken or designing Men, a mighty Opportunity of propagating their own Errors, or Interests, or Passions, together with the Truth; and of leading, even whither they please, those who have blindly deliver'd up Their Souls to their Direction. How powerfully this Principle sometimes operates, and what pernicious Effects it hath, if daily fresh Instances did not convince us, yet that of the Jews, in our Saviour's time, is but too evident a Proof. These Men were even content to shut their own Eyes, and see altogether with those of their Masters; and so thought themselves sufficiently borne out in their Obstinacy, while *not any of the Rulers or of the Pharisees had believed on him.*

John vii. 48.

Nor is their Danger, in this so absolute Deference to the Judgment of others, only when our Teachers happen to be corrupt and against the Truth; but even at such times as they are most sincere and zealous for it. For Men are still but Men, and, as such, liable to Ignorances and Infirmities. So that the Devoting our selves entirely to the very best of these is a sort of Idolatry, a setting up Creatures in the Place of the Creator; and, making them, to Us who do so, the Authors and Givers of those Doctrines and Precepts, which it is Their Business, only to inculcate and expound, and Ours to receive. To receive, not because They teach them us; but because God, who alone hath Authority and Dominion over the Consciences of Men, teaches us by Their Ministry. And therefore all they say, obliges us so far as it is agreeable with the Will of God, and no farther. Remarkable to this Purpose is that Caution of St. Paul to the *Corinthians*, To

1 Cor. vii. 10, 12.

the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord; But to the rest speak I, not the Lord. You see how careful even this great Apostle was, to distinguish between a thing imposed as a necessary Duty; and That, which was only recommended as prudent and seasonable Advice; Thereby informing us, that, even from Persons miraculously enlightened and assisted by the Holy Ghost, all they deliver is not to be received alike. Even those Illuminations and Assistances were limited to certain Measures and Occasions; and consequently the Respect, due to these very Persons, might be guilty of Excess; if no Difference were made, between what was uttered by the Dictates of the *Spirit*, and what they spake, as the Sense of their own Minds. But now, by the Son of God vouchsafing to speak to us by himself, we are secured against all manner of ill Consequences, that might grow from the Want or the Difficulty, of making such Distinctions. The Inclination so natural to us, of tacking our selves too close to Wise and Good Men, and overrating the outward and immediate Instruments of our Knowledge and Virtue, is here not rooted out, but conducted safe. For it is now fixed upon One, who always was the inward and remote, but hath at last been pleased to make himself the next and visible, Instructor of Mankind. The same absolute Authority is hereby vested in a Teacher like our selves, which was before due to none but God; and could not be ascribed to the Greatest and Holiest of the same Nature with our selves. Here can be no defect of Understanding or Judgment; No indirect End or subtle Design of misleading us; No Interval or Instant of the Holy Ghost ceasing to operate; No one Word merely Human, in Him, who cannot speak any other than the Words of God; No Measure or Confinement upon Him, in whom *are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge, and all the Fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily.* And therefore in this, this single Case, we may safely indulge

Coloff. ii. 3, 9.

indulge our Affections to a visible Guide; We may Believe and Obey without any manner of reserve; and ought most thankfully to adore that kind Condescension to our Weakness, which, finding it so very hard to disengage it self from sensible, and fix upon Objects spiritual and unseen, for its Hope and Trust; is now relieved by those Approaches of God to Us, which we could not have made to Him. How suitable to our Temper, are the Cords, wherewith now we are drawn, while a Liberty is indulged of trusting our selves to a Man; without any Robbery committed upon the Prerogative of God, to whose Guidance alone, an unconditional Belief and Obedience are due.

(2.) Another Extreme, directly opposite to the Former, which greatly obstructs Mens Improvement in spiritual Knowledge, is the Contempt of their Teachers. Especially, when the Meanness of their Natural or Acquired Endowments, or the Figure and Character they bear in the World, tempt their People to treat them with Scorn, and to proportion the Regards due to their Office, by those false Measures, of their Learning, or their Fortunes. This is a Fault so very frequent, that not one, who observes at all, can be ignorant, how unequally Men carry themselves upon the Account of such Distinctions; What Weight and Influence Honours and Preferments give to every Word of Theirs, who are recommended by them; and how neglected the soundest Doctrine, and the brightest Virtue pass, where Poverty and Plainness, the want of Countenance from Great Men, and a retired Modest Piety, make no Shew or Noise abroad. 'Twas hence, that the Apostles of our Lord, because illiterate and of low Degree, were so despised, as to be thought scarce worth the Anger of the Jewish Council. Hence, that our Lord himself, and his Doctrines, were by some thought sufficiently confuted, by the Reproach of his being the reputed Son of a Carpenter; And, that his

Acts v. 13, 21.
Matth. xiii. 55,
58.
Mark vi. 3, 6.

Miracles had least Effect in that Country, where his manner of Life and worldly Circumstances were most known. But then this was the Case of such who *judged* by the *outward Appearance* only ; but never attended to the Demonstrations of a Divine Power, with which those Doctrines came confirmed. The opening of blind Eyes, unstopping deaf Ears, loosing dumb Tongues, restoring withered and supplying maimed Limbs, reviving the Dead, and commanding even Graves to give back the Bodies of which they for some Days had kept Possession, putting evil Spirits to flight, and extorting from Devils themselves a Confession of that Truth, which of all others they were most loth to have believed ; These were much more than a Balance against any outward Disadvantages of Person and Condition. By Many of these the Apostles, who acted in the Quality of Servants only, got above the Prepossessions and the Malice of their Adversaries. By all these, and by many, by infinitely more Evidences of a Divine Power ; But particularly, by that Authority and commanding Influence, which proved this to be a Power, not only assisting and working with him, but inherent in, and essential to him, Our Blessed Lord did Right to the Majesty of One Nature, even in the lowest Ebb of the Other. This was *the Glory*, which manifested it self *to be the Glory of the only begotten of the Father*. And, though all Men did not even thus behold and acknowledge it, yet all who did, must needs honour and adore it. The Apostle allows, of the vilest and most obstinate Wretches, that, *had they known*

1 Cor. ii. 8. *him they would not have crucified the Lord of Life and Glory*. And even now, the only

Evasion Men have, to despise *Jesus* and his Laws, is by denying, either that he is God, or that those Laws are His. But Mankind never yet did, never can, degenerate into such a monstrous Absurdity of Wickedness ; as seriously to confess their Teacher to be God, and at the same time to slight the Person teaching them. Because

the

V.I. *commonly called* CHRISTMAS-DAY. 179

the Perfection and Majesty of God, even according to Our Notions of him, are so transcendently glorious, and so incomparably great; as in the Esteem of every reasonable Man, not to be capable of Diminution or Blemish upon any Account whatsoever. Let then the Manner of God's appearing be what it will; yet still, if it be God that speaks, his every Word not only ought to be, but by all who consider, and in good earnest believe this, will naturally be, received with Honour and Thankfulness, the deepest Reverence, and most submissive Awe.

Let us then, according to the Apostle's Advice, *see that we refuse not him that speaketh*, but remember, that it is a Speaker from Heaven; Heb. xii. 25.

and one who hath a Right to all our Attention, and most strict Observance. Let us with Thankfulness embrace the mighty Benefit, of One whose Knowledge knows no Bounds; and who, as He alone searches *All things, even the deep things of God*; so He, of all others, may be best depended upon, for imparting to us such a Measure of These, as his Divine Wisdom sees it convenient for us to know. Had Servants of Inferior Capacity, been equally able to instruct us; there had been no occasion for employing the Son. Had that Son, of Abilities so peculiar for this Purpose, wanted an Inclination equal to his Power; what Reason can we render of his undertaking so charitable an Office? But especially, what Account can we render of our own Behaviour, if we suffer this Charity to have no Effect upon us; If We pretend to dispute the most Authentick, to despise the Fullest, to neglect the Kindness Declaration of the Divine Will; A Declaration made by God himself, to set it above all possible Suspicion of Mistake or Forgetfulness, of Fraud or Frailty, or any of the too many Evasions and Excuses, which wicked Men so often had, and might again have found, to extenuate their Disobedience, had this Message been trusted to another Hand:

And lastly, a Message every way worthy, (so far as any thing can be so) of that King of Heaven, who condescended to deliver it himself? Shall We pay less regard to the *Son*, than all, but the Profligate and Prophane, thought themselves bound to pay to the *Prophets*? Shall we deny to the Master and Lord, a Hearing and Respect, due to the meanest Servant, producing his Commission? The noblest and highest Order of those Servants, even the blessed Angels, fall down and worship him: and shall We, placed in a lower Degree by Nature, but, by his Affection and tender Love, in some Sense preferred above them, not acknowledge and adore our gracious

Benefactor? *The Word spoken by those*
 Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4. *Angels was stedfast, and every Transgression against it received a just recompence of reward; and can We hope to escape unpunished, if the great Salvation begun to be spoken by Their and Our common Master and King shall be neglected? At least, if it shall be neglected by Us, who call him Master and Lord; and, confessing him that hath spoken to be God, shall yet, by the most absurd of all Contradictions, so impiously overturn our own Principles, as not to do the things that he hath said? When the Law was promulged in Lightnings, and Clouds, and thick Smoak, by Trumpets and Thunders and Earthquakes, we find what Terror and Awe it struck into the Hearers. And why was this, but from a Sense, that this was the Voice of God? If then the same God now speak, and give us Evidence sufficient that This is his Voice also, is not the Argument for our Reverence and Duty the same? The Manner, 'tis confessed, of his publishing the new Covenant differs; but it is to the Person, and his Authority; not to any particular Method of manifesting the One, or the Other, that our Obedience is due. And yet, supposing that too, we may be bold to say, That, in this Latter Dispensation of the Gospel, there are some Circumstances of peculiar Force, and even more engaging, than any at the Publication*

V. I. *commonly called* CHRISTMAS-DAY. 181

cation of the Law. Which I hope to make appear by and by.

3. In the mean while I observe in the *Third Place*, That We Christians have the Advantage of a Teacher, superior to all Others, not only in regard of his own personal Sufficiency, considered in himself as a Teacher; but as he is more, as he indeed is alone, capable of answering the Ends of, and giving Efficacy to, the Doctrines he came to teach us. The great Ends, which God seems to have intended the Doctrine of his Gospel should serve, are, The Enlightning our Minds, and Purifying our Natures: Letting us into a nearer View of a Future State, and the incommunicable Perfections of the Divine Nature; And bringing us to a better Likeness of those that are communicable. With regard to

the Former, *Jesus Christ is said to have brought Life and Immortality to Light*, to have declared God, to have revealed those things of God, which none could know and

2 Tim. i. 10.

John i. 18.

1 Cor. ii. 11.

consequently none could tell, but *the Spirit of God*: And many other Passages we have to the like Purpose. And Who so fit, as *He that inhabiteth Eternity*, to inform Men, what those things are, which God hath prepared for them that love him? Who could command our Belief of those Mysterious Truths, which are too vast for Mortals to comprehend, with an Authority equal to His, who, when he declared to us what God is, and does, did only declare to us Himself, and his own Actions? Of These, as it is plain no Other could have, so is it no less plain, He could not but have, a clear and full Understanding: But This is what was sufficiently spoken to before: That which I now would rather choose to make you sensible of, is, Our Advantage in the Latter of these Purposes the Gospel is directed to: The exalting, I mean, and purifying our Nature; and so rendering us more like God, in those of his Perfections, which may, and ought to be imitated by us.

Now This is, in Effect, only to refresh and restore that Image of God upon our Minds, in which Man at first was made. And, as the defacing of that Image by Sin consisted, not only in the bringing Darkness upon our Understanding, but Irregularity and Perverseness upon our Will and Affections; So, to retrieve it again, the informing our Judgments cannot suffice, without the Will and the Desires be influenced, to embrace and act those things, which we are instructed in the Excellence Of. We are taught in our excellent Liturgy, when praying for a Blessing upon our Clergy and the People committed to their Charge, to introduce that Petition, with the Stile and Title of an *Almighty God, who alone worketh great Marvels*. And very justly, since the Scripture hath told us, that *the Preparations*

Prov. xvi. 1.

1 Cor. iii. 5, 6.

of the Heart are from the Lord, and that *Paul planteth, and Apollos watereth, but it is He that giveth the Increase*. Men may scatter the Spiritual Seed, they may explain the Word of Truth diligently and faithfully, may reason strongly, exhort affectionately, rebuke courageously, enforce the Obligations to a Holy Life, and expose the Folly and Danger of a Wicked one, very dexterously: But it is not in the Power of all their Industry, and Eloquence, and Zeal, to give one Word they say its proper Efficacy. They speak but to the Air, and sow upon barren Ground, till these outward Teachings are set forward, and seconded by the Inward. They cannot dispose one of their Hearers, to consider and profit by their Doctrine as they ought; Nay, even those Hearers cannot dispose themselves to This, without the preventing and assisting Grace of God. The Creation to a Spiritual, as well as to a Natural Life, is a Work peculiar to Him. And therefore here is the incomparable Pre-eminence of Our Teacher, the Son of God, that he not only *spake, as never Man spake*, but had the Hearts of them to whom he spoke, at his disposal; He could influence and incline them as he saw

saw fit, and, by the secret Operations of his Spirit, purge and fit them for bringing forth that Fruit, which no Human Power could produce ; which no Prophet or Apostle, tho' immediately inspired by God, could pretend to; which even his own Divine Discourses miss'd of ; So oft as he was not pleased to bestow that Grace without which, not only Ours, but His Preaching was in vain, and every Man's Hearing is and must be in vain.

Let us therefore, with all possible Thankfulness, acknowledge, and set a just Value on, our inestimable Privilege of *being taught by God*, without whom all other Teachings, signify so very little. Let our Wonder cease, that so many Millions of Souls should be so speedily converted to this Faith ; when convinced by Miracles wrought in the Power of that Spirit, which He alone could send ; and when drawn by Him, who alone could enable them to come. Let This abate of all unjust Partialities to the very best of Men ; since it is not by our Ministers, not by the most moving and powerful of these, that we improve in Goodness ; but by His working in us mightily. Let us ascribe to Him the whole Praise of that profiting by his Word, which is entirely his own Gift. And let us fervently and constantly pray, that He would soften and turn to his Fear, those Hearts, which, till he strike upon them, are hard and impenetrable as a Rock. A Prayer, which, we have all the Reason in the World to believe, he will not fail most graciously to accept and grant, who hath done so great Things for us already. Those Things particularly, whereof we rejoice at this Holy Festival : when, in order to convey the Word of God to us more effectually, the eternal and essential *Word of God was himself made Flesh*. And This brings me to Another sort of Reflections, such as more immediately relate to the Manner, in which the Son of God vouchsafed to speak to us ; Even by becoming one of us. A Mystery too deep to be explained ; too awful to be boldly and curiously pried into ; and

then improved to the best Purpose, when we receive it with Reverence and humble Faith, and endeavour to excite those pious Affections, which the sober and earnest Contemplation of it hath a natural Tendency to kindle, and cherish, and keep up, in every devout Mind.

1. And *First*, How ought we to be filled with Astonishment and holy Wonder, at this surprising and altogether new Instance, which God hath given of his Almighty Power, in the Incarnation of his blessed Son ! I call it Surprising and altogether New, because so very different from all the other Demonstrations of Omnipotence, at any time exhibited to the World. The distance between God, and Any, nay All, Created Beings, is so vast; as to admit no manner of Proportion, to found the least Shadow of a Comparison upon. And therefore every Action and Dispensation of His, which proclaims his Excellence above These, is less amazing : Because it is more agreeable with the Notions Men naturally have, of his infinite and incomprehensible Greatness. But, that God

Phil. ii. 7.
Mic. v. 2.

should *empty*, and, as it were, go out of *himself*; that the Ancient of Days, whose *outgoings have been from everlasting*, should

be born in *Bethlehem*, a Child, not an Hour old; that He who fills Heaven and Earth, should be wrapped in

Luke ii. 12, 16.

Swadling Clothes; and the Majesty of the High and Holy One *laid in a Manger*; that

He whom all the *Angels worship*, should vouchsafe to be made lower than the lowest of those Ministering Spirits, who are commanded to pay him Adoration; In a word, that the immortal and impassible Creator should take upon him the Passions and Frailties, the Sufferings and Mortality of his own Creature; should begin to live, should grow, and be nourished, and hunger, and thirst, and be weary, and sleep, and be grieved, and weep, and bleed, and die, and in all Points be tempted and afflicted, like unto Us; This is somewhat, so exceeding Foreign to the Manifestations God hath used to make of himself; that

V.I. *commonly called* CHRISTMAS-DAY. 185

that it quite crosses our common apprehensions of him. That God could exalt himself, beyond all Measure, beyond all Imagination, Men, who knew any thing at all of him, made no Difficulty to believe. But that he could to such a degree abase himself, they never knew before. But when this Act had taught them it, they needs must see, that nothing less than Omnipotence could bring about the Miracles of this mysterious Condescension. And we may say with great Truth, that the Divinity of the *Word* is at least equally evident, in his own being *made Flesh*, as in *his making all Things*. *At least*: For, could a Power which is Infinite, admit of Difficulties or Degrees; we must conceive it harder, for God to appear in the Form of Weakness, than to exert himself in the utmost Activity and Strength; *To make himself of no Reputation, and be found in fashion as a Man*, than to glorify himself by the producing a whole World out of nothing; *To become obedient to the Death of the Cross*, and be murdered by his Enemies, than to *blast* all that hate him, *with the Breath of his Displeasure*, and command that whole World back to nothing in a Moment. So stupendous, so unparallel'd, an Example of the Divine Power does the Incarnation of the Son of God present us with, above any Work of Creation, or Providence, or the most distinguishing Miracles, that ever were made use of, to prove it to Mankind.

2. Let us, in the *Second Place*, turn our Thoughts upon the adorable Wisdom of God, in this wonderful Mystery of his Blessed Son's Incarnation. A Depth, which, *St. Peter* acquaints us, *the Angels continually desire to look into*, and take unspeakable Delight in the Contemplation of. How then can We sufficiently admire the Management of our God? Of Him, who, when Mankind had estranged themselves from Him, found out a Method of drawing them near, and uniting them to him again, by condescending to unite himself to them, in so close a manner, as that of taking the Manhood

1 Pet. i. 12.

into God ; Who, when they had defeated all the Means, formerly used for their Instruction, by the Ministry of his Servants best qualified for that Purpose, did not disdain this last, and most powerful Experiment, of teaching them by himself ; Of Him, who considered Their Weakness, and His own transcendent Greatness, so kindly, as to lay aside the Terrors of his Majesty, and the Brightness of that Glory, which rendered him inaccessible ; and to make it practicable for poor feeble Mortals, to see, and approach, and converse familiarly with him : Who thus found out the most effectual way of reconciling us to, and quickning us in our Duty, at once informing us by his Doctrine, and leading us by his Example ; Of Him, who debased himself to a Participation of Our Infirmities, that he might sanctify them to us, support us under them, and prove that, all these notwithstanding, we are capable of being exalted to a Participation of the Divine Excellencies ; Who, by this noblest of all Stratagems, enabled that Nature to gain a full and fair Conquest over the Enemy of Souls, which had been so often vanquished, so proudly insulted, so long and mercilessly triumphed over, and trampled under by that Enemy before : Of Him, who by being born of a Woman, hath begotten Mankind again to a lively Hope, and forbidden us to distrust, that God and Man may be made One in Peace and Affection, whom we have seen already made One in the same Person : In short, Who hath offered an Atonement, which cannot but be sufficient and effectual to satisfy for Sin, since the Victim, the Sacrificer, and the Deity appeased are One. These, and a great many other, Instances there be, which will occur to Men, who set themselves to meditate on this Subject, as they ought. Illustrious Instances all, of the wonderful Wisdom of God, manifested in this Scheme of our Redemption. But the Last does not only represent to us the *Wisdom* ; it leads us to observe withal,

3. *Thirdly*, The *Justice* of God, so very conspicuous upon this Occasion. Justice to his own Honour and Truth: Who, after having denounced Misery and Death, as the deserved Wages of Wickedness, had thereby concluded all Mankind under the fatal Sentence, *in that all had sinned*. This was a sort of foreclosing himself, from remitting the Guilt and Punishment, without a Satisfaction made for the Offences and Outrages committed against him. Justice to his Holiness: Which, being such as cannot but hold all Iniquity in the utmost detestation, he hath thus declared, how irreconcilable his Hatred to it is, by refusing to accept any satisfaction, of less value, than that of the Blood, and bitter sufferings, of his own Blessed and Co-eternal Son. Justice to the Authority of his own most righteous Laws: By representing to all the World, how highly they are concerned to obey them, and what unspeakable Torments They must expect, who are themselves wilful and impenitent Offenders; since it cost Him so dear to redeem their Souls, who himself knew no Sin, but only sustained the Person, and vouchsafed to stand in the place, of Sinners. Justice, *Lastly*, even to the Author and Promoter of all Wickedness and Injustice, the Tempter and Destroyer of Souls: Who, by contriving the wrongful Death of Him, in whom he found nothing, is thus most equitably ejected out of all that pretended Right, which the Guilt of Human Nature might seem to have given him, over the polluted rest, that partake of it. Thus, from the Instant of his being subdued by a Man, the Devil had that Prey, and those Slaves, wrested out of his Hands, in fair and open Combat, which he had basely and treacherously gotten, by deceiving and subduing Man before. Thus did it please God to proceed with this basest of all Enemies; Not by a stretch of absolute and arbitrary Power and Violence; but, in a Method of Judgment and Equity, overthrowing his Tyranny, and rescuing

Leo in *Nativ.*
Dom. Ser. 2.
Iren. adv. Hær.
L. iii. C. 20, 33.
Theodoret. Di-
al. 2.

cuing his Captives ; giving this, before wretched and conquered, Nature an Opportunity of retrieving, in the *Second Adam*, what it had lost in the *First* ; and carrying the Influence of Christ's Righteousness, as far as that of our First Parent's Transgression. Most justly : In regard Each was the Representative of all Mankind. As therefore the Guilt and Punishment of the Former descends upon the whole Offspring, who by a Natural and Carnal Birth were in Him : So does the Obedience of the Latter, upon as Many, as are related to, and conformed with the Likeness of, Christ, and so are in Him too by a Second and Spiritual Birth. All which contributes, more than can be expressed or imagined, to the magnifying Another of the Divine Excellencies, which we cannot think at all, and not observe the particular Glories of, and (if such Comparisons between the Perfections of God be allowable) its eminency above all the rest, in the Contrivance of this Mystery. I mean

4. *Fourthly*, His Goodness and Mercy. Of which I must say, as lately of his Power, that though every Event, each Design and Act of Providence, be so many fresh Instances of it, yet never was there any fit to be named, Any did I say ? No, not All taken together, are worthy to be put into the Balance, with This before us. It was indeed the Effect of Infinite Goodness, that the World was made in such wonderful Beauty and Order ; but how much of the Benefit, intended by this Creation, had been lost ; if, when Sin had brought in Mortality and Misery, One of its chief Inhabitants, to whose Comfort and Convenience so many Parts of it were designed to minister, had been left to perish ? If he must find his State in this Dwelling, converted into not only a dismal black Scene of present and grievous, but a certain Passage to eternal and unspeakably more grievous, Sufferings and Sorrows ? Let the Men of Metaphysics argue as they please, from Topicks of mere Nature ; Yet sure no Man of Sense, who believes Revealed Religion, can so refine and abstract

fract his Notions, as not to suppose it infinitely better for Mankind never to have been at all, than to have been upon such Terms as these. Our Creation therefore, as Matters quickly stood with us, was a Blessing in no Degree comparable to our Redemption: Our Second, and so much better Creation. It deserves also to be acknowledged as a distinguishing Mark of the Divine Favour, that We should be at first created in the Likeness of God; but, what Proportion is there between That, and the restoring to Us that Likeness, when most unhappily lost, by a Kindness so amazing, as that of God being made in the Likeness of Man? That he should put on Our Passions and Frailties, that we might rise to his Perfections; subject himself to our Necessities and Wants, that we might receive of His Fulness; promote us to Honour, by suffering Indignities; and open to us a way to Happiness, and Life, and a Kingdom everlasting, by a Life of Afflictions, a Death of exquisite Torture, and the voluntary Scandal of an Ignominious Cross! That all this should be done for Creatures, who, as such, could add nothing to their Creator's Honour; For Sinners, who, as such, had done their utmost to dishonour him; For Rebels and Traitors, false to all their Obligations of Duty, unthankful to their Only Benefactor, disloyal to the best of Lords, and wilful Destroyers of their own selves; Wretches, who had deserved the hottest of his Indignation, and the most dire effects of his Hatred irreconcilable! In short, This is a Subject, which the farther we enter into the Consideration of, the less we shall find our selves able to speak of as we ought. It is a Blessing better felt, than express'd. For, though its Copiousness be such, as to furnish Matter for endless Enlargement, yet to Them, who have attained to any tolerable Sense of *What, For Whom*, and especially *By Whom*, this Miracle of Mercy hath been wrought, it will be regarded as a Mystery of Love, for which the Tongues of Men and of Angels are insufficient. A My-

stery

stery, which none but He, who wrought, can fully know, and a nearer and more distinct View whereof is reserved for one principal Ingredient of that happy State hereafter, which it was intended to advance us to.

How then ought We to approach our New-born Saviour, and What is the Welcome, proper to be given to the Returns of this most happy Day? The Day, that begat us to Life Immortal, The Birth-Day of our Happiness, and all our Hopes: The Day, that brought *Light to them that sate in Darkness*, Comfort to them who lay grovelling in Despair, Mercy to the Penitent, and Pardon to the Condemned?

1. Surely we should now endeavour to raise our Souls, by a most strong and lively Faith in the Promises of the Gospel. For, how glorious soever these may be, or how unworthy of them soever our sinful selves; yet can they not possibly be so far above our Meanness, as that Human Nature, taken to assure them to us, is below the Majesty of the God, who took it. Well may we then cry out with the Psalmist, *Lord, what is Man that thou makest such account of him, or the Son of Man that thou shouldst in so amazing a manner vouchsafe to visit him?* Since therefore that hath been done already, which so far exceeds the utmost we durst hope, all we could ask or think; what is there, can there be, yet behind, which, we have reason to fear, God will esteem too good for us? Or, how shall He not freely give us all things, who hath loved us so tenderly, as *not to spare his own Son, but give this most precious of all Gifts for us?*

2. Surely we are of all Creatures most stupid and cold, if we do not, this Day especially, feel our Hearts enflamed with a most ardent Love. A Love, that shall carry us entirely to the Object, so highly deserving it; and dispose us to despise and hate every thing, in Comparison of Him, who hath set us this unparallel'd Example

ple of Kindness. A Love, that shall think no return of Service or Hardship grievous; but cheerfully sacrifice every darling Lust, consecrate every Affection of our Souls, devote every Action of our Lives, nay even those Lives themselves, if need require, to Him. To Him, Who, to make us all his own, doubly his own, after having made us, did not disdain to be made, and born, and live, as one of us; purely that he might be capable of dying to redeem us.

3. Surely, we are not the Disciples of Him, whose Birth we celebrate, if our Charity to Men be not likewise as sincere, as universal, as our Love to this God and Saviour, is fervent and entire. For, how shall we dare to exclude those, whom God hath not excluded? How deny our Prayers and good Wishes, our best Endeavours and kindest Offices, where He hath extended his Mercy, in the highest Instance, that He was capable of shewing, or They of receiving it? Are They Strangers and Aliens? He hath united us all to each other; and, from the Instant of God and Man becoming One Person, hath made all Mankind one Body in himself. Are They Enemies, who have provoked and unjustly offended us? Such, and much worse, were every One of Us, when we were reconciled and saved by this wonderful Love.

A Love, whose peculiar *Commendation* it is, that *while we were yet Enemies, Christ* was not only born, but *died for us*. Are They Inferiors, and lookt upon as not worth our Concern? That, above all Objections, ought, on this Day however, to be silent.

Rom. v. 8.

4. For, surely we are obliged on This, above all other Days, to be possess'd with the profoundest Humility. A Grace, at least as proper to the Season, as any hitherto insisted on. For never was Vanity and Pride so put out of Countenance, as by *God taking upon him the Form of a Servant*. Never

Phil. ii. 7.

the Pomp and Grandeur of the World so vilified, as by the Lord of Heaven and Earth condescending to make his

his Entry in so poor a Figure, and, from a Throne of Glory, stooping down to *Swadling Clothes and a Manger*. Never the Splendor and Magnificence of Courts, and numerous Trains, and noble Retinue, set in a truer Light; than by the Kings of Kings, contenting himself with the Ministry of his meek Mother, and choosing to receive the first Respects, and have his first Presence composed, of a few humble Shepherds. Never was the true use of Power more nicely taught, nor the cold Neglects, the haughty Arrogance, and insolent Abuses, it is apt to tempt Men to, more effectually reproached; than by this Proof, that God was then strongest, when he put on the greatest Appearance of Weakness; And, that the Princes, and Great Ones of this World, are then most truly great, most like their glorious Original above; when they think no Condescension below them for a general Good; when they do not look down from on high with Disdain, upon the poorest, the meanest, those who least deserve, at the same time that they most need, their Pity and Relief. And, Who indeed can scorn or neglect the vilest of his Fellow-Creatures, when provoked by such a Pattern of Condescension before his Eyes? For, let the Distance be as wide, as Fortune, or Station, or Birth, or even Imagination can make it; still can it carry no manner of Proportion, between Creator and Creature, God and Man. And let the kind Office, or the Love to be exercised, be magnified never so much; still all is nothing, in Comparison of that God not *abhorring the Womb of the Virgin*, and, that *he might deliver Man* from Misery, submitting to be made Man, and to endure the same Affliction, with those, whom he took upon him to deliver. Faith then, and Love of God, universal Charity, and unaffected Humility, are the pious Dispositions suited to this Occasion. Such are the Graces, such the Ornaments, with which every Soul shall be deck'd in this Festival of Peace and Love. And Ye, whose truly Christian Spirits have thus put on Christ, Come forth, and prepare to meet your God

in

V.I. *commonly called* CHRISTMAS-DAY. 193

in the kind Approaches he makes towards you. Meet him first in your Closets, with fervent Devotion and Heavenly Meditations. And, when these more retired Exercises of Piety have wrought your Souls up to a holy Warmth; *Go your way into his Gates with Thanksgiving, and into his Courts with Praise*; There fan and cherish the holy Flame your private Thoughts have kindled, by a zealous joining in the Prayers of the Church; By hearkning to the Story of this Birth, and all its Circumstances, with fixed Attention and Holy Wonder: By carefully improving those sacred Truths, which the Man of God shall find seasonable to be now inculcated: But above all, by feeding, and feasting upon, the Figures of that Flesh, which God, as at this time, clothed himself with for Your sakes; By dedicating to Him, in most solemn Manner, every Faculty and part of that Nature, which he not only came to satisfy for, but to sanctify; and hath acquired a full Right to, by this stupendous Union with his own. When this is done, Let no prophane or worldly Thoughts presume to mingle themselves with your religious ones; But give a Truce to Business and Care, to Grief, and every disorderly and melancholy Passion; And let this whole Day be sacred to Quiet and Calmness of Mind, to spiritual Comforts and uninterrupted Joys: Joys, in which your Bodies may very decently partake too, by a more liberal Provision than ordinary of those good Creatures, you are bless'd with for their Sustenance and Refreshment. But take good heed, that this Liberality degenerate not into Luxury and Riot. And now, least of any time, be guilty of dishonouring that Body, which the God of all Holiness and Purity vouchsafed to appear in the Likeness of. No, let your Plenty be made a Virtue, by opening your Hearts and Hands wide, to the Necessities of those Naked and Hungry, for whom, as well as for You, this Saviour was born. So far as in you lies, let there be no sign of Want, no Crying or Complaining in your Streets, to pollute

O

the

the Rejoicings of that Blessed Day, when the Lord of all began *to be made poor, that we through his Poverty might be made rich.* Let no Voice now be heard, but that of Psalms, and Hymns, and Hearts making Melody to the Lord. With such the Angels brought him into the Body. Nor can we think it strange, that They, who conceive a fresh Joy at the Conversion of a single Sinner, should now publish their general Joy, at the Salvation of a whole World set on Foot. But strange it may very well be thought, if Angels should sing, and Men should be silent upon this Occasion; if They should even overflow with Gladness at the Happiness of Others, and We should express no feeling of our Own. Once more, and to conclude all, Remember, that the Calves of your Lips, even when most devoutly offered, are not a sufficient Sacrifice; but, as this Day was to Jesus, so let it be to You, the beginning of a new Life. Remember, He was made the Son of Man, to make Us the Sons of God; that none can receive the Benefit of His being the Former, who do not Themselves become the latter: And, that none are the Sons of God, any farther, than they make it their Business to be *holy as their Heavenly Father is Holy.* In vain, alas! was this Divine Babe born into the World, except he be likewise born in Our Hearts. In vain did I say? Nay good were it for us, that he had never been born, if we do not live up to the Light this *Word* hath shed abroad, and follow the Example this *Word made Flesh* hath left us. Of such mighty Importance, such absolute Necessity, it is, that we should aspire to His Likeness, who hath so graciously condescended to Ours; And, *being made God's Children by Adoption and Grace,* should, not this Day only, but every Day, be *renewed by his Holy Spirit.* A Blessing, which, as we are taught to ask in the solemn Devotions of this Morning, so shall we not fail to receive, if this Festival, and the Joys of it, be rightly improved, to the Honour of Him, who in marvellous Compassion to
 poor

poor lost Man, came *as at this time* into his own World, and took our Nature upon him: Even Jesus Christ, the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the wonderful Son of a pure Virgin; To whom with the Father and Holy Spirit, ever one God, be all Glory and Thanksgiving, Adoration and Obedience, World without End.

St. Stephen's Day.

THE COLLECT.

GRant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here upon earth, for the testimony of thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors, by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O Blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God, to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen.*

Acts vii. 55.

60.

56.

ACTS vii. 55.

IN order to a clear Understanding, and due Improvement, of the Portion of Scripture appointed for this Festival; it will be expedient to premise somewhat, concerning the Occasion of it in particular, and the Person, whose Martyrdom it relates, and the Church enjoins us to commemorate.

The Author of the Book of *Acts* takes notice, in his *Second* and *Fourth* Chapters, that, among other Testimonies of the Unanimity and Charity of the first Christians, this was very remarkable; that they voluntarily parted with their Property, and, to supply the present Necessities of the Church, brought their Substance into one common Bank; Out of which Distribution was made, according to the Needs of each Believer. The Difficulty of making this Distribution, to every one's Content, would nat-

Acts ii. 44, 45.
iv. 34, 35.

turally increase, with the Numbers of the Parties concerned to receive it. This proved to be soon the Case, when converts of several sorts came in. The Grecians (such by Birth but Profelytes to Judaism, (as some think) Or (as Others) Jews by Descent, but of the *Dispersion*; (as they are elsewhere called) and so using, not the Syriack, but the Greek Language in their Synagogues) thought an undue Preference given to the Hebrew Widows; and Their Complaints first ministred Occasion, to that Order in the Church, which hath ever since continued, under the Title of *Deacons*.

The End then, which the Apostles chiefly had in view, at the first Institution of this Order, was to appoint proper Persons, to assist them in the Affairs of the Church. Particularly in the Care of the Poor: Which

Acts vi. 2, 3, 4-

now grew a Burden too heavy for a few; And especially for those, who had Matters of greater Importance upon their Hands, from which, it was not fit, This should be suffered to divert them. How far the Com-

*Cb. viii. 5, 12,
35, 38.*

mission, then given to these Persons, extended, as to the Performance of Holy Offices, is beside the Design of this Treatise

to dispute. It shall suffice to observe, that we have, in the *Eighth* Chapter of this Book, an Account of One of them, both Preaching, and Baptizing, in the Ab-

Ch. vi. 3.

sence of the Apostles. The Care taken in their Qualifications for this Office; speaks it to have been esteemed of great Importance to Religion; and Many are of Opinion, that those, who were now chosen

*Pearson ubi
supra.*

into it, were of the Number of our Lord's Seventy Disciples.

Among These the First was the Saint of this Day. Whose Zeal for the Faith enflamed the Envy of its Adversaries, and engaged him in warm Disputes, with the Members of the Synagogues then at *Jerusalem*.

These

These were, not only Places of Publick Worship, but a sort of Colleges and Schools, where Men were instructed in the Law and Traditions of the Jews. Who, being now dispersed in several Foreign Parts, had Synagogues peculiar to their respective Countries, in which the Youth of such a District were Educated. Five of these Synagogues attack *St. Stephen* at once. Who, finding themselves unable to vanquish him in Controversy, dealt with Men of profligate Consciences, to accuse him of Blasphemy; and then, in a tumultuous manner, they bring him before the Council, in order to obtain a formal Sentence of Condemnation against him.

The Matter brought in Charge, and that returned to it in his own Defence, give us fair Intimation, what was the Subject in Dispute between *St. Stephen* and the Members of those Synagogues, who contended with him. The Arguments, used by Him, against the perpetual Obligation, and Necessity of the Mosaick Institution, the Accusers aggravate, by representing them, as blasphemous Words against *Moses* and

Ch. vi. 11.

against God. And the Charge he had brought against the Crucifiers of our Saviour, the Vengeance he threatned them with for that Sin, and the Exhortations to submit to the Gospel-Covenant, are, in like manner, loaded with that odious Character, of Blasphemies against the Temple and the Law. For so they explain themselves, and ground their Allegations upon this, *Ch. vi. 14. We heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this Place, and change the Customs Moses delivered us.*

From this Imputation of Blasphemy *St. Stephen* vindicates himself, and, at the same time, supports the Arguments charged with it, by an Historical Account of the most memorable Actions and Events, from *Abraham* down to *Solomon*. The Design whereof is to shew, that the Law, for which they at this time express'd so fierce a Zeal, as if no Salvation could be attained any other way, could not possibly be of that weighty Consequence

and absolute Necessity, which they fondly imagined. And this Proof may be reduced to Three Reasons.

- (1.) Because (as is plain from the History of *Abraham* and the *Patriarchs*) their Ancestors pleased and continued in the Favour of God, for more than Four hundred Years, without it.

*Cb. vii. Ver. 2,
to 37.*

Since therefore these were God's Peculiar and Elect, before that Law was given; it follows, that this Law could not be the Covenant, and Dispensation, for saving Men, exclusive of all others.

- (2.) Because the very Prophet, at whose Hands they received the Law, gave them warning of

Ver. 37, 38.

Another eminent Prophet, whom God (in Ages to come) would raise up from among them, *like unto Him* (that is, a Law-giver too;) and to whom every Soul among them was commanded, upon pain of utter Excision, to yield Attention and Obedience. Consequently, Preaching the Faith and Obedience of *Jesus*, who was that very Prophet, could not be Blasphemy against God, or

*See Deut. xviii.
15, &c.*

Moses. Quite contrary. This had a direct Tendency to magnify Both, by leading Men to Him, whom God had decreed, and *Moses* had foretold, to be the Saviour of all them, and only Them, who should submit to be taught by, and stedfastly place their Hope and Trust in, Him.

- (3.) Because that Law, they now pretended so great

Ver. 39, to 50.

Reverence for, was plainly insufficient to contain them in their Duty. This appeared from the frequent Relapses into Rebellion and Idolatry, which the Prophets sharply reproached, and threatened with so many severe Punishments. And, all this, notwithstanding the Presence of God perpetually among them, in the Tabernacle first, and then in the Temple; which yet they were not to suppose God so fond of, as to spare from Destruction, if the Peoples Sins called for Vengeance. And therefore, as the ancient Prophets thought it no Profanation, either of the Law, or of that Holy Place,

Place, to denounce the Abolition of the One, and demolishing of the Other: No more was it any in St. *Stephen*, to declare the Extirpation of the Former, and the utter Ruin of the Latter, to a Generation of Men, now ripe for Destruction. Such as had not only imitated, but far exceeded, the Obstinacy and Malice, and Barbarity of their Forefathers. All which, as this holy Man was about to shew, in the Process of his Discourse, he seems to have been interrupted, by the Clamour and Tumult of his Adversaries; and thereupon raised to that Indignation, express'd at the *Fifty First* and following Verses. Ver. 51, to 55.

There he flies out, in Rebukes so smart and home, that the Guilty Audience, not able to endure him any longer, were carried to all the Marks of Spight, and Rage, and Fury implacable. Under which how He behaved himself, and what this Malice ended in, the Portion of Scripture, appointed for the Epistle, is intended to acquaint us.

THE EPISTLE.

Acts vii. 55.

PARAPHRASE.

55. **S**tephen being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into Heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

55. Stephen was so far from being discouraged at these Expressions of Rage, against him, that animated with the Comforts of

the Holy Spirit, he lifted up his Eyes and Heart to Heaven; and had a Vision vouchsafed unto him, representing clearly the Majesty of God, encompassed with his Holy Angels; and that Jesus, whose Cause he had pleaded, and for which he was about to die, exalted as God-Man to the same Majesty, and in a Posture of Readiness and Power to succour and receive him.

56. And said, Behold, I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

56. This Vision, so graciously afforded for his Support, he boldly declares to the Assembly, before whom he then stood.

57. Then they cried out with a loud Voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord.

58. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

57, 58. At the hearing whereof, they unanimously exclaimed against him, and by stopping their Ears, expressed their utmost

utmost Detestation of the horrible Blasphemy they pretended him guilty of, in affirming a Man, whom he confessed to have been lately put to Death, now to be glorified, and to reign with God in Heaven. And, looking upon his own Words, as a sufficient Confirmation of the Crimes before alledged against him: They gave a loose to their Zeal, dragged him with Violence out of their City, (as was usual in the Execution of impious Malefactors) and went to inflict on him the Death, prescribed in the Law, for Blasphemers and Seducers to Idolatry. Which, that they might do with more Expedition and Dexterity, the Witnesses, who by the Law were to have the first Hand in the Execution (a Ceremony importing the Truth of their Testimony, and a taking upon themselves the Guilt of the Blood shed thereupon, in Case it were false; and therefore wisely ordained to make Men very cautious what they deposed in Evidence) stripp'd, and committed their Clothes to the Custody of a young Man (afterwards a zealous Preacher, but now a bitter Persecutor of the Christian Faith) called *Saul*; who thus declared his Consent, and Concurrence in that wicked and bloody Fact.

59. Then the Witnesses first, and afterwards the People, cast Stones

at this good Man, who, in the mean time, continued to express the greatness of his Faith in that Saviour for whom he suffered, by commending to his Care and Custody that Soul, which, though now about to be separated from, yet he knew very well should not die with his Body.

60. Nor was his Charity less exemplary and wonderful, than his Faith.

For he did, in most devout manner, beseech God, not to charge this Sin to the Account of them that slew him. And with these Words in his Mouth this First Martyr died. A Death, which, in regard of the Meekness and Composure of Mind he underwent it with, as well as the Certainty of his Resurrection to a better Life, is rather to be called a Sleep, in which the Body lay down to rest a while, till it shall please God to awaken and unite it again to that Soul which had put it off, and which in the mean time lives and acts in a separate State of Bliss, prepared for the Spirits of good Men.

59. *And they stoned Stephen calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my Spirit.*

60. *And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this Sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep.*

The Time of this Martyrdom is by Some* placed after our Lord's Death about Eight Months, † by Others at the Distance of about Four, by Others again Seven ‡ Years. *Eusebius* is express,* that it followed quickly after his Election into the Office of Deacon; and from *St. Chrysostom*, and some Others who speak in his Honour, we are to conclude, that he was martyred young. The Scripture acquaints us farther, that his Body was interred with Solemnity, and such

Lamen-

* Usser. Ann.
Vet. & Nov.
Test. ad Ann.

Christ. 34.
Pearson Annal.
Paulin. p. 1.

† Le Sucur. ad
Ann. 38.

‡ Evod. apud
Niceph. l. 2. c. 3.

* Hist. Eccl.
l. 2. c. 1.

Lamentation, as was proper for one, whose Labours the Church lost, though she gained by his Example. The Place where he suffered, is said to have a stately Church built upon it by *Eudocia* the Empress, Wife to *Theodosius*.

Evagr. Hist.
Eccl. l. 1. c. 2.

COMMENT on the Portion of Scripture for
the Epistle.

FROM celebrating the Glories of God clothing himself with a Body of Flesh, we pass to the Respects due to the Leader of that noble Army, who willingly unclothed themselves, and put off this Body, for the Testimony of *Jesus*. Yesterday shewed us the Heavens opened, for Angels to sing forth the Praises of the Son of God, descending from thence; To Day the same Heavens open, to discover the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, and stepping forward, as it were, to take up thither a Spirit, not only commended to him, but offering its mortal Attendant as a Sacrifice, the First Sacrifice, for his Truth. In the Circumstances of which Heroick Action, described by St. *Luke* as you have heard, 'tis easy to observe a great Variety of Matter; all conducing very much, to the Honour of that Saint we now remember, and to the Edification of every pious Christian, who shall set himself seriously to consider and remember him as he ought.

As *First*, We have here the great Mercy and Goodness of God, in vouchsafing to St. *Stephen* such extraordinary Measures of his Grace, such a comfortable and ravishing Prospect of the Glories of Heaven, to sustain and fortify him, in the Conflicts of his approaching Death, for the sake of his Blessed Son. And this is contained in the 55th and 56th Verses.

Secondly,

Secondly, We have likewise the Stedfastness and Vigour of St. *Stephen's* Faith, in committing his Ver. 59. Soul to *Jesus*, at his last Minutes. An Action, which does evidently imply a firm Belief, (1.) That his Soul was a Substance distinct from his Body; (2.) That it should not die with, but continue to exist when separated from, the Body; (3.) That the same *Jesus*, whom he had acknowledged to be very Man, is likewise very God: One able to hear and grant this Prayer, and to preserve the Souls commended to his Protection and Care. And (4.) That the Spirits received by Him, are in a State of Safety and Happiness.

Thirdly, Here is an admirable Pattern of Meekness and Charity; Of tender Compassion for Them, Ver. 60. who have none for Us; and of forgiving our bitterest and most bloody Enemies; even then, when, if ever, our angry Resentments might seem allowable. For all this is the Result of St. *Stephen's* praying, that the Guilt of his Death might not be charged to the Men, who most wrongfully inflicted it: Doing this, at the very Instant of their executing their Malice, and adding to his Agonies; And persevering in this invincible Charity to his last Breath, as if God's Mercy to these hardened Wretches were the thing, which, of all others, he was most concerned to implore, with the dying Accents of a Tongue to speak no more. Thus not only imitating that Blessed Lord, for whom he was content to be so barbarously murdered; but, by his Example, confirming the Truth of St. *Paul's* Assertion, that, *though a Man have all Faith, so that he could remove Mountains, and though he give his Body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth him nothing.* 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3.

It is not necessary to add more Reflections, though more there be, which this Portion of Scripture might suggest to us. Nor shall I enlarge upon the Two last
of

of These, but reserve those Considerations to another Place; where we shall have Occasion to observe the same Actions, in a greater than *St. Stephen*. So that my Discourse at present shall confine it self to the *First* Head.

*Gospel for
Thursday before
Easter.*

The great Mercy, I mean, and Goodness of God, in vouchsafing to this Martyr in his last Conflicts, such extraordinary Measures of his Grace, and so comfortable a Prospect of the Glories of Heaven. *Stephen full of the Holy Ghost, &c.*

Ver. 55, 56.

And here I shall apply my self to consider Two Things.

First, The Nature and the Seasonableness of the Supports, said here to be afforded *St. Stephen* upon this Occasion.

Secondly, What Conclusions we may be allowed to make from this Example, for our own Comfort and Encouragement, under any Sufferings and Dangers, which the Providence of God shall think fit to engage us in; More particularly, upon the Approach of Death.

I. Let us observe, in the *First* Place, the Nature, and the Seasonableness, of the Supports afforded *St. Stephen* upon this Occasion. And of these we find Two expressly mentioned. The Fulness of the Holy Ghost then upon his Mind; And the View of God's Glory, and of Jesus standing at his Right Hand in Heaven.

(1.) *First*, Particular Notice is taken of *Stephen* being at this time *full of the Holy Ghost*. The Character given of him, when first mentioned in this History, is, That he was a Man *full of Faith and of the Holy Ghost*. Which what it means is easy to learn, from another Passage quickly after, where we read, that *Stephen full of Faith and Power, did great Wonders and Miracles among the People*. These Texts, compared together, shew, that the Holy Ghost, there spoken of, denotes those extraordinary Gifts

Acts vi. 5.

Ver. 8.

Gifts of the Spirit, which enabled this Holy Man to awaken and convince Unbelievers, by those wonderful Operations, confirming the Truth of his Doctrine.

Matth. vii. 22. And this, our Lord hath taught us, was a

Privilege, not always confined to Persons of Sincerity and eminent Piety. But, by the Holy Ghost in the Passage now before us, I take another sort of Gifts to be meant. Such Virtues and Graces, as were proper for, and shined forth with so bright a Lustre in, St. Stephen's present Circumstances. Such unseen, and yet such mighty, Peace and inward Joy, as, with regard to the Persecutions and Troubles of his suffering

John xij, xv, xvi. ing Servants, might move our Lord, most fitly to promise this Spirit, in the Stile and

Title of a *Comforter*. Such eager Zeal and undaunted Courage, to do and suffer all Things for Christ and his Truth; as should baffle all those Weaknesses or Inclinations of Nature, which dispose us to be too tenderly affected, with the Ease and Comforts of the Life we now lead. Such Heavenly-mindedness, as fixes all our Hopes, and directs all our Aims, so as to center in the Rewards reserved for a future State, and makes every Affliction look light and little in our Eyes: So far from being to be dreaded or declined, as rather to be embraced and chosen, delighted and triumphed in, upon

2 Cor. iv. 17. the account of that *eternal weight of Glory, which this worketh out for us*. Such Love of God, as esteems it a Blessedness to be sacrificed for his Honour. Such Love of our Brethren, as grudges no Pain or Expence, that may contribute to the Salvation of their Souls. Such Love of our Enemies, as returns Goodwill for Hatred, Prayers for Persecutions, Meekness for Malice; and is in all Points conformable to Him,

1 Pet. ii. 21, 22, 23. *who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered threatned not, but committed his Soul to Him that judgeth righteously; and hath herein left us an Example, that we should follow*

follow his Steps. These Dispositions make up a Frame and Temper of Mind, so different from the Tendencies of Human Nature, as the Case now stands with it; so far superior to any thing, that the Principles of mere Reason could suggest; that, wheresoever we see them, we may be confident, they came down from above; and are entirely owing to a Power and Wisdom, that assists and directs, raises and refines, influences and over-rules, our natural Powers. Experience and Observation both assure us, that very liberal Measures of these supernatural Helps are necessary, to produce such shining Perfections. And therefore, though the Communication of these Helps had been large, and the force of them very conspicuous, in the Other Parts of *St. Stephen's* Conduct; yet they seem to have been much more plentifully shed upon him, in this last Act of his Life. So plentifully, that, (as if the Frailties of a Mortal were quite absorb'd, and he had no Motions left in his Soul, but such as were thus inspired) he is for that Reason very significantly said to be *full of the Holy Ghost*.

Nor was the Goodness of God more remarkable, in the Degree of these Assistances, than in the Time, made choice of for imparting them. For, What Circumstances is it possible to form to our own Imagination, that could stand more in need of them, than those, in which *St. Stephen* was at present? He had been exercised with perpetual Opposition, ever since (we are sure, and probably before) his Election into the Ministry of the Church: Attacked by Men of Principles, that are generally implacable. For such are, blind Zeal, and Worldly Interest. Each of them hard, when single, but Both in Conjunction, almost impossible to be brought to Reason. His Enemies, enraged with the discredit of being defeated by him in their publick Disputations; Wretches of a Conscience so profligate, that, to retrieve their own Repute, and rid their Hands of so troublesome, because so powerful, an Adversary; they

Chap. vi. 10.

had suborned false Witnesses, and brought him before the Council and high Priest, only to put the better Face on the bloody Design, and, that they might murder in Form of Law. His Vindication from their Calumnies had been so far from softening, that it did but the more exasperate; insomuch, that being now lost to all Temper, and all Decency, they, instead of replying, *gnashed upon him with their Teeth*. A Gesture, that speaks the Extremity of Anger and Fury ungovernable, of unrelenting Cruelty, and Envy, and Spight.

- It was easy to discern, whither all this Rancour would grow; and necessary, that the direst Effects of it should be borne, with a Magnanimity and Meekness, that might adorn, and demonstrate, the Power of that Doctrine, for which St. *Stephen* suffered. And, since the Person called to suffer for it, was of the same Infirmities and Passions, the same natural Aversion to Pain and Death, with common Men; God was graciously pleased to conquer these Reluctancies, and strengthen those Weaknesses, by a Grace, that rose in Proportion to those Over-flowings of Ungodliness, whose impetuous Torrent was to be stem'd by it. Again. Since every Act of Christian Obedience is supposed and required to proceed upon rational Principles; Since that of dying for Religion, the last and highest Instance of it, ought to do so too, at least as much as any; thereby to distinguish it self from Humour, and Hardiness, and Folly; And, since it could not be rational, for a Man voluntarily to divest himself of a Good in Possession, except by way of Exchange for some greater Good in Reversion; It follows, that nothing can so much contribute to a Man's suffering cheerfully for a Good Cause, as the assured Expectation of a Reward upon that Account, which will abundantly compensate all that he can possibly endure. But now, because things engage our Affections, and move our Desires, not in Proportion to what they are in their own Nature, but according to the Apprehensions we have of them; upon
this

this Champion's entring the Lifts with Malice, and Violence, and Death, it pleased God to grant him a

2. *Second Support*, contained in those Words, which relate of St. Stephen, that *he looked up stedfastly into Heaven, and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.* Whether this Opening of the

Matth. iii.
Luke iii.
John i.

Heavens were real, and such, as is generally believed to have been at our Lord's Baptism in *Jordan*, Or whether this, like several Appearances to the Prophets of the Old Testament, were represented to St. Stephen, by way of Vision; As we cannot certainly know, so is it of no great Consequence, that we should. For, in regard a Vision is described, by Them, who are particularly curious in these Matters; to be such a *distinct and strong Impression upon the Faculty of Imagination*, as sets the Object before the Man, as plainly as if it actually were present, and perceived by his bodily Senses; it is out of Question, that Either of these ways comes all to one, as to the Certainty of Persuasion, and every other Effect, which we can suppose it intended to produce, in the Mind of the Party acted upon by it. And therefore, besides the Operations of the Holy Ghost already mentioned, I make no doubt but One was, to assure St. Stephen, that he was under no Delusion in this Case, but influenced and enlightned by God, who thus opened his Eyes, by an extraordinary Grace. And, as, in other Instances, the Heathens are described to open, and the Spirit said to enter into Men, and They to be in the Spirit, and the like; So He is here said to be full of the Holy Ghost, and to see the Heavens opened, when these Discoveries were made; And that, in a manner lively and clear, which no natural Powers of the brightest and most penetrating Mind could ever have attained to.

Maim. Mor.
Nev. P. ii. C.
36.

Ezek. i. 1.
ii. 2. iii. 14.
xi. 24.
Rev. i. 10.

Such were the Discoveries, in the Case now under Consideration; The Majesty of God, surrounded with Light, to which no Mortal can Approach, attended with a numerous Retinue of Angels; The Person of *Jesus*, invested with Power and Dominion; And that Human Nature, which had of late been so ignominiously treated, that Body which expired upon a Cross, now placed in Honour at the Right Hand of his Father, and giving Law to all those Heavenly Powers, than whom he had a little while submitted to be lower. These Prospects of those Blissful Regions, gave this Martyr a clear Sight and Sweet Foretaste of the Joys and Glories, reserved for all Them, who shall be ever with their dearest Lord. These I conceive to be the Objects and Ingredients, that made up *St. Stephen's* Vision. The Nature whereof being thus explained, it remains only, that I observe the Seasonableness of this Mercy to him, to finish my first Head of Discourse.

To this Purpose let us consider, of what Use this was, or might have been, for the Conviction of Others, and of what it certainly was to *St. Stephen* himself.

1. It certainly was, or might have been of great Use, for the Conviction of Others. And for that Reason, no doubt, *St. Stephen* immediately declared it to the Assembly. Which, consisting principally of Persons learned in the Law, and History, and altogether, as is most probable, of Men making Profession, of the Jewish Religion, ought to have been restrained from their intended Mischief, and turned their Thoughts to another sort of Considerations. They were not ignorant, that such glorious Appearances of the Divine Majesty had been frequent under the Old Testament; and that such Marks of God's especial Presence were Marks of Kindness and Distinction; that he did not use to be so particular in the Manifestations of himself, except to those, who were as particularly acceptable to Him, and very highly in his Favour. So that, to Persons educated in, and possessed of

of, these Notions, it is not easy to conceive, what more authentick Testimony could be given, of St. *Stephen's* Innocence, or the Truth of all he preached, and of his Conduct and his Cause being approved and espoused above.

But That, which ought yet more effectually to have proved all this to them, was the Other part of St. *Stephen's* Vision, wherein *Jesus* was represented *standing at the right hand of God*. Such an Exaltation of Him, whom they had so lately persecuted in his own Person, and now continued to persecute in his Members, declared most evidently the Divine Love and Favour, not only to that Saviour, who had suffered such Indignities, while himself was upon Earth; but to all those, who should afterwards suffer for His sake, and after His Example, to whose Righteousness the Father had given the unparallel'd Attestation, of seating his Human Nature upon his own Throne in Heaven. And yet this very Circumstance did, above all the rest, inflame the Malice, and sharpen the Envy, of the Jews. So blind were they to all those Evidences for the Truth, which, if admitted, must have produced a Self-condemnation for all their Prejudices and former wicked Practices. So hard it is to bring habitual Sinners, to forsake and retract the Errors and Vices, to which they have been used to abandon themselves. So far are those Means of Conversion, which, in their own Nature, are fit and sufficient, from proving efficacious and successful in the Event. Such is the Misery of those wretched Men, whom God, in the Justice of his Judgments, delivers over to a reprobate Sense, by drawing down upon their own Heads the Prophet's Curse in its most fatal Meaning; making the *things* Psal. lxxix. 23.
which should have been for their Wealth,
an Occasion of falling deeper and more desperately. For, What else did these enraged Zealots, when, instead of being awed, or in any degree restrained, by the manifestation of this Glory, they made his publishing the mighty Favour, a fresh, and more unpardonable Provo-

P

cation

cation to murder him? What did they but extract Poison out of the richest Antidotes, and render the most Sovereign Remedies, the most incurable Aggravation, of their Disease?

2. In the mean while the wonderful Effects of this Mercy are no less conspicuous, upon a Mind rightly prepared to improve by it. For, Who can express the Comfort, the Joy, that St. *Stephen* must needs have conceived, upon such a glorious Scene opening before his Eyes? When Death, in its most terrible Form, drew up to him, and Rage and Violence were swallowing him up; what could so powerfully support Human Nature, under the Fears, and Weaknesses, which, in such critical Junctures, it is least able to get above? What loosen all those Bands, which are apt to fasten us down to things present, and agreeable to the Appetites which we now carry about, and are perpetually acted upon by; like a sensible Demonstration of the infinitely more desirable State, awaiting every Disciple of that Master, who dares to trust and so far take his Word, as to choose the losing his Life, for the true Method of saving it? What Vigour and Strength must it inspire into this noble Champion for the Truth, what Firmness to his former Resolutions, to observe the Judge of the Combat looking on? Nay, not only keeping his Eye upon every Conflict, but stepping forward, as it were, to his Assistance; holding forth the promised Crown of Life and Glory, ready to be put on, as soon as the Toil of the bloody Field should be over, and his Servant's Faithfulness unto the End had won the inestimable Prize? What fulness of Assurance must that Hope be raised to, which saw *the Man Christ Jesus* glorified? Saw him, not only as the Judge and Rewarder, but as the Example, and the Pledge, of Sufferings rewarded; and, in His Glory, consequently foresaw its own? What Sting could that Death have left, which led to such a Life? What Resentment could that Malice provoke, which, the more fierce and implacable it was, the more it

it made the Party, pursued by it, to resemble that great Pattern; and whom it planted together into the Likeness of his dying, was sure to advance to a proportionable Likeness, of his rising and reigning in Heaven! Well enough may the Men, who make Sense their Principle, and the World their God, look on the Atchievements of martyr'd Saints, as the Effects of blind Enthusiasm and ungovern'd Zeal; Well enough They, who feel no Motions, taste no Comforts, but such as Nature furnishes; and know no Spring but Passion, no Law but Reason, detract from the Praises due to their Gallantry and Greatness of Soul; impute their Meekness, their Constancy, their Charity, to Weakness, or Phlegm, and natural Stupidity; or else represent them as impracticable, and therefore hardly credible: But where it pleases God to shed forth his Grace, and pour forth his Consolations, with a liberal Hand; there Men find themselves able to do and suffer much more, and in quite another manner, than they supposed it possible; And than it was indeed possible, to have come up to, without such plentiful Accessions of Strength from above. And therefore, even the Conquests, gained by the Martyr of this Day, deserve our Praise and Wonder; Though very much upon the Account of those Sufferings and Virtues, which have immortalized his Honour; yet most of all upon the Account of that extraordinary Grace, which even filled him with the Holy Ghost, and that *Glory revealed*, with which, he rightly reckoned, that *the Sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared.* Oh happy Sufferings, which qualified the Endurer, to have part of his Heaven upon Earth! Oh Death truly triumphant, which put him into actual Possession of Joys, whose Prospect alone made so entire a Conquest over Infirmities and Temptations, Agonies and Terrors! But above all, Oh Goodness and Mercy, tender beyond Expression! which so kindly considered the Greatness of those Infirmities, common to all Man-

Rom. viii. 18.

kind; the Force of those Temptations and Terrors common to dying Men; and more especially strong upon Them, who die by Violence and Wrong; as to send Supports, as extraordinary as the Occasion. Supports, contrived to animate, not Him only, to whom they were then vouchsafed, but full of Hope and Consolation to Others, to all the Faithful. For, though the Favour we are treating of were particular, yet the Influences of it are large and general. And, while we recollect St. Stephen's Privileges, we do but half our Business, if they be not so considered, as to help us in a right Understanding of our Own. To which Purpose it is, that I promised to observe in the

II. *Second Place*, What Conclusions are allowable to be drawn from this Instance before us, for the Comfort and Encouragement of every good Christian, under any Sufferings and Dangers, which the Providence of God shall at any time think fit to engage him in; more particularly upon the approach of Death.

An Enquiry this, of so much greater Importance, because of all the Advantages in this World, which recommend the Christian Religion, none are more valuable, than those Comforts we are encouraged to hope for from it, in such distressed Circumstances, as need it most. When human and temporal Succours have forsaken us, and leave no other Dependence for the Soul to rest it self upon; but the Sense of a gracious God, and a good Conscience at present, and the Prospect of a glorious Reward for our Sufferings hereafter.

Now, of these Assistances and Supports in general, there are many Texts of Scripture, which sufficiently assure us. Such as those, wherein God declares, that

2 Cor. xii. 9.

1 Cor. x. 13.

his Grace is sufficient for his afflicted Servants; that his Strength is made perfect in their Weakness; that he will not suffer such to be tempted above their Ability, but will

with the Temptation also make a Way to escape, that

they may be able to bear it; That he will never leave them nor forsake them. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I Heb. xiii. 5, 6.
will not fear what Man shall do unto me. Such Pas-

sages, and sundry others of like import are every good Man's Security, that no necessary Grace or Consolation shall be wanting to him. And the many extraordinary Instances of these Supplies, so abundantly imparted to the Saints heretofore, are so many Pledges, and fresh Confirmations of the Truth of God, in Promises of this Nature. But in what Manner, what Measures, what Seasons, these Consolations shall be afforded to each of Us, those Examples are no farther a Rule to judge by, than the Case of those Saints, and Ours, are alike. And therefore when we argue from this Topick, if we would avoid Mistakes, and not flatter our selves with groundless Expectations, or charge God foolishly, for not allowing us Privileges that belong not to us: It must be our great care to distinguish aright, with regard to Three Things.

1. The Exigencies of the Cases compared.
2. The Qualifications of the Parties concern'd.
3. The Nature of the Blessings and Supports themselves.

1. As to the Exigencies of the Cases compared; *St. Stephen's* hath a great many Particularities in it, which forbid us to make it a Rule, for the Sufferings and Death of good Christians in common. He was a Martyr for the Gospel. And it is very reasonable to suppose, that God, in his Goodness, will not fail to give Demonstrations of his Love, suitable to the Degree of Theirs for Him, who give the last Proof of their Sincerity and Zeal, by sacrificing their Lives to His Service. We cannot think it strange, that he should make clear Evidence, how kindly he accepts so costly an Oblation; and not only enable such Men to offer it cheerfully, but shew them, by a View more than usually distinct, what They

shall receive in exchange in another World, who have accounted nothing dear to them in This, so they may win and bring Honour to their Lord.

But, if the shining Virtues, and flaming Piety, of Martyrs in general, seem so justly to recommend them to particular and distinguishing Marks of the Divine Favour in their Conflicts; there is a great deal more to be said, why St. *Stephen* should be yet more eminently distinguished. He was set in the Forefront of the Battel, the first of that noble Army, who resisted unto Blood, in Defence of *Jesus* and his Truth. And it was of mighty Consequence, what Issue that Encounter met with. Of mighty Consequence, not only to the Champion himself; but to the Cause in which he was engaged, and to many Millions of Souls, who were to engage in it after him. The Religion, which undertook so boldly to renounce the World, and *brought Life and Immortality to Light*, was then in its Infancy. And an Instance of those Regions of Immortality opening themselves, to One, who had so stedfastly fixed his Eyes upon them, and, in the Strength of that Vision, triumph'd over Death and Malice in their ghaftliest Form, proved the Force, as well as the Certainty, of those Hopes, and that Faith, inspired by the Gospel. His Adversaries, who had recourse to the same Methods of Subornation, and pretended Blasphemy, and Violence, and Tumult, in taking off this diligent Servant, as they had lately exercised upon his Master; deserved to meet with the Mortification, of finding their Envy defeated, and their Hypocritical Zeal publicly disallowed, by the God they profess'd to serve by it. But especially They that already did, and they That were about to embrace this Religion, which, in a Time of general Persecution, could not but cost them very dear; needed the Benefit of such an Example, to animate and fix their good Beginnings. 'Twas fit to shew these Men, how ready Heaven was to receive them; what Mansions were prepared there; how true that Promise is, that, where
their

their Lord is, they shall be also; And, in the mean while, that He, who had vanquished Death, by enduring it, was always able, always at Hand, to empower those, who tread in his Steps, to vanquish it the same way. And thus we may see, that St. *Stephen's* Case is far from being a measure for Christians in general; or any Warrant, to promise themselves, the same Supports he found. For, as a Martyr, it was reasonable, He should be sustained with higher Degrees of Grace, than They who undergo common Dangers, or die a natural Death; Because it is One thing to die *in* one's Duty, and Another to die voluntarily *for* it. And, as the First Martyr, it was fit He should be a Pattern, and Encouragement, to the rest who were to follow. A Pattern, by the Perfection of his Virtues, An Encouragement, by the Revelation of his glorious Reward.

But, though we cannot assure our selves of these Spiritual Comforts, in the like Manner and Proportion, where our Circumstances are not alike; Yet, so far as the Comparison holds, we are warranted, from such Instances as This, to rely upon, and be very confident of, suitable Assurances and Supports. For God is always the same. His Goodness and Wisdom never fail to consider the Infirmities of Human Nature, and that *Flesh* which is *weak*, even when the *Spirit* is *most willing*. He will ever be very tenderly concerned, for the Advancement of his own Honour, and of the Religion he hath enjoined and espoused. And therefore, of what kind soever our Trials be, or from what Cause soever they proceed, due regard will certainly be had of them. And This ought to content us; since we are in the Hands of One, who is a better Judge of our Necessities, than our selves can possibly be; One, always determined rather to give over-measure, than to with-hold any part of what we really lack; One, not confined to any particular Method, but furnished with infinite Variety of Means, for conveying the Riches of his Grace to us;

One, that knows how to make a lively vigorous Faith, and holy Hope, supply the Place, and serve the Purposes of Vision, and immediate Revelation ; One, who can let Heaven into the Soul of Christians thus disposed, as well as set the Beauties of it before the Eyes of St. *Stephen*. But then they must be Persons disposed, as St. *Stephen* was ; for That, I said, was a *Second* Distinction, necessary for directing our Judgment, and justifying our Expectations, in Matters of this Nature.

2. The *Qualifications of the Parties concerned*. Tho' there be nothing in the very best of us that can deserve, either that Grace of God, which enables us to do or suffer according to his good Will, or that Light of his Countenance lifted up upon us, when we do so ; Yet no Truth is more express, than, that these Gifts, free as they are, will not be dealt to all promiscuously. They always require and pre-suppose a Temper of Mind, fit for, and so far worthy of them, as to be within the Conditions they are promised upon. In St. *Stephen* accordingly, we cannot but observe a bright Constellation of the noblest Virtues. A Constancy immoveable, A Zeal most ardent, A Resignation unreserved, A Faith, and Meekness, and Charity, invincible. And, can we wonder that the Blessed Jesus made such condescending Approaches to One, who drew so near, came up so high toward Him, not only in the Wrongfulness and Manner of his Death, but in the Exercise of all those Graces which adorned it, which rendred it so exemplary, so fruitful in Profelytes, so victorious over Enemies and Gainsayers ? The History of the Christian Church furnishes many Instances of Persons, who, in the Times of Persecution, laid down their Lives, and underwent Tortures inexpressible, with a Cheerfulness and Magnanimity, far surpassing the Powers of Human Nature. Persons, the Tenderness of whose Sex, or the Circumstances of whose Condition, were by no Means a Match for the Sufferings they have been called to. And who yet, by their astonishing Cheerfulness,

ness, and undaunted Courage, have gained over more to the belief of the Truth they died for, at their Last Hour, than their most artful Reasonings, and most moving Eloquence, had been able to convince, during the whole course of their Lives. And fundry Others have, in every Age, met, and encountred, and conquered Death, (which even when most natural, is a fore Conflict) with a Composure of Mind, that excites the Admiration, and almost the Envy of the Beholders. But, if the Cases in either of these Kinds be now more rare, than might in Reason be expected; It is not, because the Arm of our Almighty Helper is shortned, or that the Force of Religion and its Principles is abated in it self; but from the Degeneracy of those, who check the Influence these might have upon them. It is indeed, because They, who never felt the Power of Christianity while they lived, in vain expect the Supports of it, when they come to die. When Men under Insults and Injuries, seek to relieve themselves by Contention and Revenge, they take the Matter out of God's Hand, and discharge that Protection, which his Honour engages him to extend, to those who *flee from Wrath, and let go Displeasure, and commit their Cause and Persons entirely, to their Righteous Judge and most merciful Creator.* When Distresses and Dangers put us upon unlawful Means of escape, or tempt us to trust to an Arm of Flesh, in the use of such Means, as are most lawful; we have no longer Right to look, that He, whom we shut out (so far as in us lies) from any part in our Affairs, will appear and interpose so visibly in our Favour, as he hath often done, and is always ready to do, for Them, who flee streight to Him for Succour, and make his Providence their only Rock and Refuge, and disclaim all other Confidences, as impious or vain. When our last dreadful Enemy marches up, and makes his Attack in all the Pomp of Terror; *When our Flesh and our Heart faileth,* Can we suppose, that God will declare himself

himself Their *Portion* in Another Life, who never esteemed or desired, in This Life, any Portion, but the Pleasures, or Greatness, or Riches of the World, which are now forsaking them? No certainly. Nothing but a Resemblance of St. *Stephen's* Virtues, can entitle us to St. *Stephen's* Consolations. A Mind unlike His is not worthy, is not capable, of them. To triumph over the Malice of our Enemies, we must bring our selves to forgive the worst they can do to us. And that, not only when the Passions are cool, or Time hath laid our Resentments to sleep; but at the very Instant of our being highest provoked, and smarting most sensibly under the wicked Effects of their Spight. To enjoy the reviving Prospects of a glorious Eternity, it is necessary we should, with Him, *look up stedfastly to Heaven*; that our Affections and Hopes, our whole Heart, our whole Treasure, should be there. And to *Sleep* as he did, when this long Night shall close our Eyes; we must, as He *did*, *commit our Spirits into the Hands of the Lord Jesus*; be perfectly content to leave the World, at any time, in any manner, he sees fittest for us; we must devote our selves entirely to his Service, and be solicitous for nothing, but that, *whether we live, we may live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we may die unto the Lord*. To this Frame of Mind if we in good earnest aspire, we shall soon find those Excellencies in Religion attainable, which, while at a distance from, we find some Difficulty to admit, as credible. And we shall then also taste those sweet Satisfaction, which are *Pearls not to be cast before Swine*, and too *Holy to be given to the Dogs*. But, till this be endeavoured with all our Might, for whatever we fall short in the Assurances or the Comforts of Grace, the Loss and the Blame is all due, to our own Unfaithfulness and Sloth.

3. The *Third* and last Distinction to be made upon this Occasion, concerns the Nature of these Blessings, and Supports themselves. A Distinction, no less necessary than

than Either of the Former. Because they are manifestly of Two Sorts; Some of them, Helps, toward the Discharge of our Duty; Others of them, Satisfaction, that sweeten it to us. The End of the Former is to preserve us in Safety, That of the Latter, is to keep us at Ease. The One we cannot be without, because they are Assistances; and therefore These, which come within the Notion of necessary Grace, are within the Covenant; Such as God leaves no Man destitute of, if the Fault be not in the Person that wants them. The Other are properly Comforts, and come within the Notion of Rewards: And, since the Rewards of our Obedience are strictly in the Happiness of a Future State, These are, what we are rather to wish, and pray for, and rejoice in, than absolutely to depend upon. God is very gracious and bountiful in affording them, because they are Overmeasure; but he is not unjust in with-holding them, because they are uncovenanted Mercies. These are indeed usual, but by no means inseparable, Attendants upon doing well. But Those, not only follow, but go before us, in well doing; For, till we have Them, we can do no manner of thing that is good. When St. Paul prays, that God would fill the *Romans with Joy and Peace in believing*, he supposes Rom. xiv. 13. their Faith to be sincere, before the obtaining of that Joy and Peace. And many Passages assure us, that the Comforts of a good Life, and what we find called the *Light of God's Countenance*, are frequently with-held from excellent Persons, and may be so, for their great Advantage. This may be done, as a farther Trial of their Patience and Perseverance, their unchangeable Love of God, and the Firmness of their Trust in a Recompence hereafter, the larger in reserve, by how much less they have down in hand here. And therefore, in all our Dangers and Distresses, we ought to think our selves well dealt with, if we have enough from above, to encounter, though not to soften, our Difficulties; to pre-serve

serve and secure our Virtue, though not to fulfil our Joy. And, even in our last Agonies, though God do not let in Heaven upon us, and raise our Souls up to St. Stephen's Pitch ; 'tis very well, if he sustain our Hearts, rescue us from the Enemy, who then especially besets us ; and grant that wise and modest Prayer of our

Burial Service. Church, in not *suffering us at our last Hour, for any Pains of Death to fall from Him.* In

short, Helps are for a State of Combat ; but Joys are for a State of Victory and Triumph. And therefore, till the Field be won, it ought to content us, that we

are encouraged to *come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find*

Grace to help in time of need : and exhorted *not to be weary in well-doing,* with this Promise, that

though we do not yet, yet *in due Season we shall reap, provided we faint not.*

I have chosen the rather to be large upon this Point, not only because the Case of St. Stephen seemed to minister a proper Occasion for it ; but in Hopes of correcting an Error, very common in the World, of laying too great a Stress upon the temper of Mind, in which Men appear to depart this Life. It is indeed a comfortable and very desirable thing, when a good Man obeys this last Call, with all the Signs of Contentedness and Tranquillity of Spirit. But this is not a Circumstance of such Weight, as upon It alone, to form any reasonable Judgment of our Brethren's State, in the World to which they are gone. Such a Death, 'tis true, is very agreeable to the Condition of sincere Penitents, and devout Christians. It is, what the Reflections upon a Life well spent, and the Sense of a God reconciled through the Merits and Sufferings of a crucified Redeemer, are above all things capable of producing. On the Other hand, Nothing arms Death with so sharp and painful a Sting, as the bitter Remembrances of Sin unpardoned, the loud Reproaches of a guilty Conscience, and the dismal

Appre-

Apprehensions of a provoked Judge. But then it is to be considered withal, how strongly the Mind and Body work upon each other, and what a speedy Communication of Infirmities passes between them. The different Degrees of natural Courage, the several Constitutions of our Bodies, the uncertain Motions of the Animal Spirits, and the Ebbings and Flowings of a Distemper. These, and a Hundred more Causes there are, either Natural or Casual, in which Religion hath no part at all. And these upon a Bed of Languishing, may create such different Impressions, as shall sometimes occasion Agonies and Fears in exceeding good Men, and a seeming Quiet and Security in very bad Men. If then we would be safe our selves, and think rightly of others, let us govern our Opinion, and our Behaviour, by this Rule, which will never deceive us ; *That* the way to die the Death of the Righteous, is to live the Life of the Righteous ; and, if we desire our Latter End should be like His, it must be our Care, that our Beginning, and our whole Proceeding, be like His too. For, though the Consequence be not great, what Mistakes we are guilty of, in regard of Them who go before us, and who are not one whit more or less happy, for the Judgments we make of them ; Yet they are of mighty Consequence in regard of our selves, who are too apt to be content with That, which we fondly imagine to be sufficient for Others. But, be assured, that when we come to die, the Exercise of one proper Christian Grace will stand us in more stead, than a great many of those imaginary Satisfaction, with which Our selves, or Others, may happen to be then transported. And therefore, if we hope in earnest to attain *St. Stephen's* Happiness, we should rather make his Virtues, than his Vision, our Pattern. And, provided we have but the Former, the Matter is not great, if God do not allow us the Latter. Let us therefore make the right Improvement of having this eminent Saint in Remembrance, and endeavour, as well as pray,

pray, that our Minds may be brought to his holy Frame. So that, in all our Afflictions, but especially in any which it shall please God to call us to, for *the Testimony of his Truth, we may stedfastly look up to Heaven, and by Faith behold the Glory which shall be revealed; And, being filled with the Holy Ghost, whose necessary Graces are never wanting, to any who diligently seek and use them, may, attain to that eminent Instance of Charity, to love and bless our Persecutors.* Thus shall we find the Help and Favour of Him, *who standeth at the right hand of God, to succour all them that suffer for him; and who, if not appointed to suffer for, yet do their utmost to live and die in, his true Faith and Fear, the Blessed Jesus, our only Mediator and Advocate.*

See Acts vii. 60. xii. 1.
v. 40. xiii. 50. xiv. 5, 6, 19.
2 Cor. xi. 24, 25.

THE GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

St. Matth. xxiii. 34.

34. A Proof of all that Hypocrisy and obstinate Wickedness, which I have laid to your Charge, you will shortly give, in the barbarous Treatment of all sorts, which the Persons, inspired by God, Preachers and Expounders of the Christian Law, shall receive at your merciless Hands.

34. **B**Ehold, I send unto you Prophets, and wise Men, and Scribes, and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your Synagogues, and persecute from city to city.

35, 36. Which incorrigible Malice and Obstinacy will provoke God not only to punish this present Age of the Jews, for the Sins and Murders committed by their own

35. That upon You may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, Son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the Temple and the Altar.

Persons; but also to bring upon them the Vengeance due for those, committed by their Ancestors. Whose Wickedness they have been so far from being reformed by, that they have imitated, repeated, and far exceeded it all.

36. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

37, 38. Oh wretched People (of which Jerusalem is the Metropolis and common Mother) who thus persist in mur-

37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not;

38. Behold

38. *Behold your House is left unto you desolate.*

claim you! How many Instances of the tenderest Affection, how many Offers of Conversion and Grace, of Protection and Defence, from the Calamities now approaching, have I over and over laid before you? but ye have rejected them all. Therefore these happy Opportunities are about to be taken away from you, and your deserved Destruction is irreversibly decreed.

39. *For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.*

dering those who are sent to teach and to re-

39. For, take my Word, the time of my present Manifestation among you will last but a little longer;

and after that, those Words of *David*, which, when applied to me, by the Acclamations of the Multitudes, provoked your Indignation, shall then in vain be in your Mouths, expecting your Messiah as a Deliverer, whom you shall find a just Avenger of your Crimes against him. Or, (as some Interpreters) this heavy Displeasure of God shall continue upon You, and Your Posterity, till you shall be converted, and acknowledge me for the true Messiah (prophefied of by *David*) at my Second Coming.

COMMENT.

WE have here a remarkable Prediction of Two Things. (1.) The unparallel'd Cruelty of the Hypocritical and Unbelieving Jews, upon the Preachers of the Christian Faith. (2.) The Severity of those Judgments, which were, by that Provocation, drawn down upon this inflexible People, and their City, polluted with so much innocent Blood. The Former of these Predictions began to be fulfilled in the Martyr of this Day. The Latter was charged upon him, as Blasphemy against God, the Law, the Temple, and the Holy City, and made a Pretence for gratifying their Malice by his Death.

Acts vi. 11, 13, 14.

In treating of this Scripture, I will first very briefly explain one or two Difficulties, for the better understanding of it; and then raise some practical Observations, which may help us to improve by it.

1. The First Difficulty I shall take notice of, is that, which learned Men have thought so differently about, The Person meant in the 35th Verse, by the Name of *Zacharias*

Zacharias the Son of Barachias. Concerning whom They seem to judge very probably, who think him that *Zechariah*, mentioned to be slain by the Command of King *Joash*. The Occasion of his Death was the Freedom he took, in reproving a wicked People; The Place agrees with that mentioned here; The Sin of it is expressly said to be visited upon the King and the People; Vengeance was imprecated by his last dying Breath; and the Name of *Barachiah*, being of the same Sense with that of *Jehoiada*, 'tis thought, might in common use be put for it, in Reverence to that Name of *Jehovah*, which the later Jews, esteeming it unlawful to utter, where the Letters of that Name occurred, are said to have substituted another, of like Signification, in its stead.

There are indeed Three Circumstances, which incline to *Zechariah*, one of the Last Prophets. *Zech. i. 1.* One, that he is expressly the Son of *Barachiah* in Holy Writ; A *Second*, That he is, in one of the Jewish *Targums*, said to be murdered in the Holy Place; A *Third*, That being later in Time, and but just before the Gift of Prophecy ceased, his Blood is thought more properly to be set, as the opposite Term to that of *Abel*; the One as the First that ever was, the Other as the Last Prophet under the Law; Both put to Death by wicked Men, merely because they were Themselves, and laboured to make Others, Righteous.

Either of these Opinions hath its probable Arguments; Each far Superior to That, which applies this Passage to *Zachary*, the Father of *John* Baptist. Who does not appear, either to have been sent to the Jews under the Character of a Prophet; or to have been owned by them as such; or to be the Son of *Barachias*; or slain as is here mentioned (except by a Tradition of no Credit at all.) So likewise, for that other *Zacharias* mentioned by *Josephus*, it hath been thought not so sufficiently made out, either that his Father's Name was the same, though
near

near it ; or that he was a Prophet ; or that our Lord's Words can, without some Violence, be referred to an Action, done after the Time of speaking them.

Mean while, though somewhat might be expected on so celebrated a Question, I content my self with saying the less, because the Knowledge of this particular Person signifies little to us ; the general Sense in the Paraphrase sufficiently declaring our Lord's Intention, and serving all the uses, this Text is capable of.

2. Another thing I conceive to be necessary upon this Occasion, which is, To set before you the just Extent of that kind Offer made by our Lord, to *gather* these Jews, *as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings*: An Expression that hath been thought conveniently enough interpreted, in either of the Two following Senses.

1. This manner of Speech plainly signifies Protection from Dangers. Thus *David* describes the good Man's Safety, by saying He shall *be covered under God's Wings, and rest secure under his Feathers*. Psal. xci. 4. A manifest Allusion to Fowls, sheltering their Young, upon the Approach of Birds of Prey. And then by this People's *House being left unto them desolate*, we are to understand the withdrawing that Protection. Which when deprived of, they would stand naked and alone ; as liable to Destruction, as little Chickens are to be devoured by every ravenous Creature, when the Dam is not at hand to succour, and spread her self over them.

2. But Some place a peculiar Elegance in this Expression, with regard to the ancient Sanctuary, in which the Cherubs shadowed the Mercy-Seat with their Wings. And, because this was an Emblem of God's especial Presence ; (a Presence no where else so visibly exhibited) therefore the Admission of Profelytes into Covenant with the true God was called by the Jews, a Receiving, or *Gathering*, of such under the *Wings* of the Divine Majesty. And thus our Lord's Willingness to *gather Jerusalem's*
Q
Children

Children under his Wings will mean all the kind Endeavours, to convince and instruct them in the Gospel-Covenant, and to make them Partakers of those Privileges, and that Salvation, which they, with so blind and unpersuadeable an Obstinacy, held out against.

I see not, I confess, any necessity, for strictly confining the Words to either of these Senses, in bar to the Other. For, since it is usual in every Language, by One eminent Instance to intend All the Effects of any Passion; this Expression may very well be extended to every Mark of Tenderneſs and Natural Affection, so visible in the Creatures alluded to toward their Young. And, in proportion, to all the Testimonies of our Lord's Paternal Kindneſs and Care, whether relating to their Spiritual, or their Temporal, Preservation. If so, the Punishment threatened to the Refusers of such Kindneſs, will include, not only a withdrawing his Defence from their City and Nation, but a depriving them of those Means of Grace, which had been so long, and so liberally, but withal, by reason of their own Perverſeneſs, so unsuccessfully, afforded, repeated, continued to them, before those dreadful Judgments were suffered to take Place. The *Romans* could not demolish their House, till that invincible, but mighty, Force within the Walls was drawn off. The Devil could not absolutely captivate their Minds, so long as the Word and Spirit of Truth strove against him. But, when they refused to join in their own Defence, the Grace of God would depart, and give them over to that Blindneſs, in which they remain to this Day. And when their Hypocrisy and Barbarity had made God their Enemy too, the Power of Man would then find it as easy, to seize and ravage, burn and destroy; as it is, to lay a Dwelling in Ruins, which is left perfectly empty, and forsaken of those Owners or Inhabitants, whose Concern it was formerly to support and defend it.

Thus much may suffice for the Explanation of this Passage. I now proceed to make Improvement of it,

by some Practical Observations, proper to be raised from hence.

I. As *First*, From the Case of the Jews, we may easily discern how very heinous, and provoking in the Sight of God, the Sin of Persecution is. To stand it out against all the Power of Persuasion, and not entertain the Truth when proposed with the Evidence, brought by our Lord and his Apostles to confirm it; was a Perverseness, like that of a Brood, refusing to be gathered under the Wings of the Hen. But to do despite to, and count such Persons *our Enemies*, because they tell us the Truth; to torment and murder those, whose only Aim is to reform, and shew us our Errors, and so prevent our eternal Undoing; This is just such unnatural Cruelty, as it would be, if the Brood should fly upon their Dam, and tear her in pieces, when she kindly offers them Protection, and spreads those Wings abroad to receive them, under which alone they can be safe. This is such a Prodigy of Ingratitude, as no Creature but Mankind, as none but the worst and most unreasonable among Men, were ever guilty of. And accordingly we find, that, after the several black Enormities and gross Impostures, by which the Honour of God and Religion is said, in this Chapter, to suffer so greatly; the indelible Reproach of *Jerusalem*, the last unpardonable Aggravation of her Sins is charged, upon her being a *Killer of the Prophets*, and a *Stoner of them that were sent to reclaim her*.

'Tis thus that they are said to *fill up the Measure of their Fathers*. 'Tis hence, that our Saviour calls them *Serpents and Vipers*, and asks, *Ver. 32.* how they can *escape the Damnation of Hell*. *Ver. 33.* And the Reason of their Proceeding in this Manner was their Hypocrisy; Using Religion as a Matter of Convenience, and putting on the Form of it for a Disguise, to cover their Ambition or
Q 2
their

their Covetousness, their Pride or their Sensuality, which made them loath to have their Eyes opened, to the Prejudice of their Interests or their Lusts. And, if their Teachers would be troublesome, be it at their Peril; for, when other Means failed, they knew one effectual way, to quiet and put them to Silence, by making the Loss of their Lives pay for the Forwardness of so bold a Zeal.

But we will put the most favourable State of the Case: Admit then, that Persecution is not always from a sensual or worldly Design, but sometimes from a good Meaning; which really supposes the Preachers of Truth to be ill Men and Deceivers, and the Honour of God, and their own Duty, to be highly concerned for suppressing and rooting them out. For thus our Lord fore-

John xvi. 2.

Acts xxvi. 9.

Rom. x. 2.

warns his Disciples, that *whosoever killed them would think he did God Service*; And

St. Paul testifies, not only of himself, that he *verily thought he ought to do many things*

against the Name of Jesus of Nazareth; but likewise of many of the Jews, *that they had a Zeal for God, though not according to Knowledge*. Yet still Persecution is a great and crying Sin, even in those, who think themselves bound to persecute. The not knowing better did not excuse these Jews, from that heavy Load of Calamities, denounced against them here. And St. Paul styles what he did in that Persuasion, the Effect of *exceeding Madness*, and himself a *Blasphemer, Injurious Person, and Chief of Sinners, because he persecuted the Church of God*, though at the same time he declares, *he did it ignorantly and in Unbelief*.

Acts xxvi. 2.

1 Tim. i. 13,

15.

he persecuted the Church of God, though

at the same time he declares, *he did it*

Now the Reason of this is plain and uncontestable. For a Man's Opinion of Things does not alter the Nature of the Things themselves. Moral Good and Evil are fixed in their own Condition and Essence, and in the Determination of the Divine Will. If my Conscience then

then put me upon that which is Evil, it is not my mistaking it for Good, that can make it cease to be Evil, either in it Self, or to Me. Every Man's Conscience, 'tis true, is the Candle of the Lord within him: But it lies upon every Man, to take good Heed, at what Fire that Candle is lighted: That the Directions issuing from it be pure, and taken from the Word of God; and not from the Prejudices of his own Mind, and the Heat of a Sanguine or Enthusiastick Imagination. For, the want of this Care is the very Reason, that so many People are misled, and run even into the horriblest Extravagancies, upon pretence of Conscience and Religion. They bring their Interests, or their Pleasures, or some other Prepossessions along with them, and then they accommodate Matters so, as to make the Laws of God stoop and bend to their own Humours. Those are, to Them, like first Self-evident Principles; and all things else appear true or false, in proportion as they agree, or disagree, with Those. This therefore is the Condemnation, that They, who mean right, do not take due Care to understand and Judge right. A thing impossible to be done when things are not considered fairly, all Heats or Animositities, Inclinations or Interests, Resentments and Respect of Persons, apart.

Now the letting our selves be misguided, in such a Case as Persecution, cannot escape great Blame. Because, however Men may happen to think differently in Matters of less Moment, or about dark and doubtful Controversies; yet it is so exceeding evident, that Treachery and Malice, Tortures and Bloodshed, are Methods so vile and black, so very dishonourable, so very unfit for winning over Men of a contrary Judgment, whose contrary Judgment is all their Offence; (for otherwise it is not properly Persecution) that one must have quenched a great deal even of his Natural Light, and have read the Scriptures with a very strange Byass upon his Mind, who can turn his Thoughts to the Practice and Justification

tion of such Proceedings, upon any the most plausible Pretence whatsoever. In short, Zeal is like all other Passions; When rightly placed and duly moderated, of admirable Use and Benefit: But if blind, so as to mistake its Object; or excessive, so as to degenerate into Fury; 'tis like a mad Man in the Dark, that lays about him without Fear or Wit.

That then, which must bear a Man out in acting according to his Conscience, is the right Judgment, which his Conscience makes. Every boasted Light is not rashly to be followed, for (God knows) there are, in Religion too, many *Ignes fatui*, that lead Men into Bogs, and Precipices, and Ruin. But a true Light that cannot be, which carries Men quite away from the first and brightest Principles of Charity, and Justice, and even common Humanity. Such is the Sin of Persecution, even when owing to that most favourable of all Causes, an ignorant Zeal: Because then too the Vitiousness of the Means spoils all the Honesty of the Intention. And, though it be good to be *zealously affected always in a good thing*; yet if the thing be bad, so much the more zealous as the Affection is, so much the worse it is; Both for the Mischief it does in the World, and for the Guilt of the Person moved to act by it.

II. *Secondly*, The Example of those Jews is a good Warning to us, not only how sinful, but also how unpolitick a Method Persecution is, and how improper to compass the Ends, generally intended to be served by it. The Two great Arguments urged by that wicked Consult of the Jews, for putting Jesus to Death, were, lest
 John xi. 48. *if they should let him alone, the whole World should go after him, and the Romans should come and take their Place and Nation.* And yet that very putting him to Death was the direct Occasion of both these Events. Nor were They singular in such Disappointments. For many Instances have taught the
 World,

World, that violent and sanguinary Courses are by no means fitted, either for suppressing Doctrines attacked by them, or for establishing, and securing, the Persons and Opinions, that have recourse to them. There is a certain Tenderness in Human Nature, disposing us to Compassion, and a kind Concern, for Them, whom we see treated injuriously. And the Sufferings of such People, when supported with Meekness and Constancy, move us more effectually, than most other Arguments, to enquire into the Merits of a Cause, thought worth maintaining, at the Expence of Mens Lives. This made the Seed of the Martyrs Blood produce so plentiful a Harvest of Believers. And, ordinarily speaking, Men cannot do the Truth a greater Service, than to shew themselves unreasonably bitter against it. For, where This is the Mark of Envy and Opposition, God thinks himself concerned to interpose, for the Vindication of those, who are sent upon His Errand; and in the Exemplary Punishment of Wretches, so hardened, that they will not consider, and so unrelenting, that they will not endure, either his Message, or his Messengers. Thus we see, that, of all the Corruptions, which cried aloud for Vengeance, both upon *Jerusalem* in this Gospel, and upon the Spiritual *Babylon* in the Revelation of St. *John*; None were so piercing in the Ears of God, none of so fatal Consequence to the Authors, as that Blood of the Saints, which would not be pacified, till dreadful and speedy Revenge was executed, on the Places polluted with it. So ill chosen is Persecution, so unlikely to succeed, whether we regard the natural Consequences of the Thing, or the Justice and Providence of Almighty God.

III. The Passage before us may be of great Use, for vindicating the Justice of God, in visiting the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children. The Difficulties, usually thought to lie upon such Dispensations are, I conceive, sufficiently answered, by the following Considerations.

1. That the Punishment, inflicted on such Occasions, is always some Temporal Calamity. For God never threatens, nor can it be proved that he ever inflicts, eternal Punishments, upon any Person whatsoever, for Sins, which were not of his own committing.

2. That even these Temporal Punishments are, in their own Nature, capable of turning to the Sufferer's Advantage. For thus they manifestly do, when, by the smart and load of the most sensible Afflictions, Men are more powerfully awakened to bethink themselves, and change their courses. They may take warning, by the feeling of God's Wrath in this Life, to prevent the insupportable and infinite Terrors of it in the next. And, if this be not the Consequence of all our present Calamities, the Failure is, not from any want of Tendency or Capacity in the Things themselves, but from our own want of improving them, to Purposes, which they are abundantly qualified for serving, when rightly applied.

3. That since every Man hath rendred himself liable to Eternal Punishments by Sin, it cannot reflect upon the Justice of God, to lay upon him the heaviest of temporal Punishments. This is not an extremity of Rigour, but rather a Mitigation, and a Mercy. Especially, considering what was last alledged, that every temporal Judgment is capable of turning to Good, and of having the Effect of a Remedy, as well as a Penalty.

4. That, for these Reasons, it can be no Reflection upon the Righteousness of God, that he permits those Sufferings to lie upon Children, which in the natural Course of Things, descend to them, by means of their Fathers Sins. As Poverty upon the Family of a riotous and profuse, Diseases and bodily Infirmities upon the Posterity of a luxurious and lewd, Ancestor, and the like. This is but suffering Causes to produce their Effects; And those too such Effects, as They, who smart under have deserved to feel, and yet may profit by the feeling of them.

5. But

5. But, *Fifthly*, It very often happens, that Children go on, and repeat, and add to the Sins of their Fathers, by offending in the same Kind and Degree. This is very likely to come to pass, from a Resemblance in Temper and Constitution, from the Intimation of ill Examples (which are not only always at home, and familiar to them, but corrupt with some sort of Authority, as being their Parents Actions) and from the Mischief of a negligent or vitious Education. And, in such Cases, the Sins of Children are the more provoking, because They do not take warning by their Parents Wickedness, nor the Threatnings of God against it; but grow bolder by it, and draw down that Wrath upon themselves, which the Long-Suffering of God forbore to execute upon former Generations.

6. *Lastly*, Such Sins sometimes grow Publick and National, and require Punishments, that are Publick and National too. In which case the Community is always the same, though the Members, whereof it is composed, be not the same. And then there is a Necessity of such Punishments being inflicted in this World, because there will be no such thing, as Societies, or Bodies Politick, in the other World. So that, upon such Occasions, the Sufferer and Sinners are the same, because the People or Kingdom, sinning and suffering in a publick Capacity, are to be considered as One and the Same.

And Such, as it is generally the Condition of Children, visited for the Iniquities of their Forefathers; so was it in particular the condition of these Jews before us. The Judgments here denounced were Temporal only, Such as had, in their own Nature, a Capacity of awakening and reclaiming them; Such as they had provoked God to send upon them, by not only imitating, but far exceeding, and *filling up the measure of their Fathers Iniquities*; by with-
Ver. 32.
 standing a clearer Light, crucifying the Son of God, and murdering those that bore Testimony to his Resurre-
 ction;

ction: Such, *Lastly*, as were National, and proper to revenge the Crimes, that had been such. So that, upon the whole Matter, every Man's own Sins are the true and proper Cause of his own Punishments. And This vindicates the Justice of Providence. But the Sins of Ancestors may be the Occasion of God's choosing to punish their Descendents, in this or that way; and may determine him as to the Kind, the Degree, the Time, and particular Circumstances, of the Punishment he inflicts. All which, relating only to the Manner of doing it, and not to the Equity of the Thing done, no way affects the Justice, but only argues the Wisdom, of Providence. Had the Parties been guilty of no Sin, that of their Parents should not have exposed them to suffering. But in regard themselves had deserved to suffer in this, or in any other, Manner, that their offended Lord saw fit; the Parents Sins, and Their Repetition of them, may reasonably be allowed to quicken the Season, and to fix the Method, of Punishing. So that this Time, and this Manner, should be thought more fit, than any Other.

IV. *Fourthly*, This Passage gives Men a fair Intimation, how far they may expect Assistances from God, and how much depends upon themselves, in order to their Conviction and Obedience of the Truth. He sent his Prophets to *Jerusalem*, but she might choose, whether she would believe and reverence, or whether reject and stone them. He offered to *gather her Children under his Wings*; but he left it in their Power, to accept or to refuse those kind Invitations. And, as the frequent repeating of such Proffers was Evidence sufficient of the Maker's Sincerity, so the persevering in such Refusals was Proof undeniable of the Rejecters Perverseness. Now the Jewish Nation are often termed God's *peculiar, his beloved People, his Vineyard, his pleasant Plant*; And since God

Exod. xix.
Isai. v.

God declares he had done all, that could be done, to make them fruitful ; it must needs be of great use, to have a right Notion of his Dealings with those Men, into whose Place and Privilege the Christian Church succeeded. For, by finding out the true Causes of Their Barrenness, we shall be enabled to justify the present Methods of Providence, and in good measure to prevent our own.

Now they, that shall consider this Matter impartially, may see very plainly, (I think) that, in the Business of Salvation, God proceeds with Men, by Methods of Persuasion, but not of Constraint. He allows the Means that are sufficient, but he does not think himself bound to render that, which is sufficient, necessary and irresistible. He gives Men Opportunities of knowing their Duty ; He warns them of the Danger of transgressing it ; He does this, by the Ministry of his Word, by repeated Admonitions, by the Calls and good Motions of his Spirit ; by the Checks of their own Consciences ; by inflicting such Temporal Punishments, as are fitted to awaken them into better Consideration ; and by threatening Eternal, so sure, so terrible, as ought in all Reason to affright them into better Manners.

But still the Success of all these Methods will turn upon our complying with, or holding out against, them. We may improve, or we may neglect, the Opportunities of Knowledge and Instruction : We may duly apprehend, or we may defy, the Danger of Disobedience : We may hearken to, or we may stop our Ears against, the good Advice of our Teachers and Friends : We may follow, or we may stifle, the Motions to Godliness within, and silence the Reproaches of our own Minds : We may be reformed with *David*, or we may, with *Pharaoh*, be more desperately hardened, by Afflictions : We may dread the Terrors of the Lord, or we may laugh at Hell, and think it but a painted Fire. In short, all that is done, all that can be done in this Case, supposes an honest

honest and diligent Application of our Minds, to render it effectual. The Honour of God is concern'd, to see us want nothing, that may dispose a sober and teachable Temper, to believe and to act well and wisely. For our Service could not be a reasonable one, if the Arguments proper to draw us to it, were not superior to those, that persuade the contrary. But God does not drag Men without Consideration, nor will he compel them to consider. For such a Service could not be voluntary, nor consistent, either with his Glory to accept and reward, or with the Principles and Original Constitution of Human Nature, to pay. He forces none to sin, for That would be a Blemish to his own essential Goodness; but he permits even the blackest Crimes, to shew that he will not destroy the essential Liberty of Our Will. He leaves us to choose our Virtues, that so they may qualify us for a noble Recompence: And he suffers our Vices to be our own Act, for otherwise they could not be capable of Punishment.

To suppose, that *Jerusalem's House had been left unto her desolate*, if her refusing to be gathered under Christ's Wings, had been the positive and unavoidable Decree of God; and that, notwithstanding so many Tenders of Mercy, she could not possibly have been gathered; draws Consequences after it, too horrid to be mentioned. It represents the Judge of all the Earth farther from doing Right, than the most inhuman and corrupt Judges in this World, ever were, or could be. 'Tis to involve our Saviour in a manifest Contradiction, and in effect to make him say, *How often would I have gathered thy Children, and yet I never would!* And what a Mockery is this now, what an Indignity, to all the tender Inclinations, he so affectionately expresses for their Good, to all his Tears and moving Lamentations over their Obstinacy and Ruin, to all his solemn Calls and Warnings to Repentance? And therefore, if we will do our dear Lord Reason, and believe him in
any

any Degree sincere, in his most serious Protestations of this kind, we shall do well to observe from the Text

V. *Fifthly*, That (generally speaking) God's Desertion of Men is occasioned by their own Disobedience. Because our Lord *would so often have gathered Jerusalem's Children, and they would not*; therefore *their House was left unto them desolate*. I have already said, that these Words may be intended both of a Temporal, and Spiritual, Calamity. The Former is the Destruction of that City and Nation; The latter is, removing from them the Light of the Gospel. But Both represent to us such a withdrawing of God's Favour, as is the Effect of their own Sins. Nothing is more plain in Scripture, than that all Sufferings of this present Life, how different soever in Kind or Degree, yet spring from the same bitter Root: And nothing more obvious to the Light of Reason, than that a Being, Infinite in Goodness, cannot take Delight in the Miseries of his Creatures. Whatever therefore happens of this Nature, the true Account of it is, That God, considered in the Quality of a Governor, sees such Dispensations necessary, to preserve the Honour of his Laws, and to contain his Subjects in their Duty, by making sometimes terrible Examples of refractory and presumptuous Offenders. Accordingly, through the whole course of the Jewish Story, we find, not only their Blessings, whether Publick or Private, constantly suspended on the Condition of Obedience; but likewise, upon every remarkable Judgment that befel them, express mention made, of the particular Provocations, which moved God to such Instances of Severity. Here more especially, where the last dismal Desolation was foretold, God is said to have determined it, because they had even exceeded all the Rebellion, and bloody Malice of their impious Forefathers. Indeed, because every Method of treating them was found so perfectly in vain, that they grew not one whit the
better,

better, but a great deal the worse, for all their Remedies. The Servants and Prophets of God had been ignominiously handled, The Son of God himself crucified, The Apostles and Disciples of that Son, risen from the Dead, stoned and slain with the Sword, before this dire Resolution of Vengeance took Place. Exhortations and Warnings, Threatnings and most importunate Expostulations, had been all thrown away upon them. Many Signs of their approaching Ruin foretold, Many fore Distresses entertained, without any Impression or Effect. And then at last, when both the Time and

Luke xiii.

the Pains, the *digging about and dunging* this *Fig-tree* turned all to no Account; then, I say, and not till then, the Patience of this Master of the Field was wearied out. Then after so many Expectations defeated, after so much Care and Cost bestowed to no Purpose, the Dresser of the Vineyard receives that fatal Order, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?*

Thus it is, with regard to Mens Temporal Concerns. And, are we not, think you, greatly Injurious to the Goodness of Almighty God, if we suppose his Kindness and Long-suffering less indulgent to our Spiritual? The

reason, given by St. Paul, why Jesus said unto him, *Make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem*, follows in the next Words, *For they will not receive thy Testimony concerning me.* And the Account He and Barnabas render of their Conduct at

Antioch, is this, *It was necessary the Word of God should first have been preached unto You, but seeing ye put it from you, and judge your selves unworthy of everlasting Life, lo we turn to the Gentiles.*

Now the Grace of God, to render the Preaching of the Word effectual, is represented in the New Testament, as a Mercy, no less necessary in order to Salvation, than is the imparting of that Word itself. And therefore we have Reason to conclude, that the same Methods

of Providence are observed, with regard to the Inward, as to the Outward Expedients. We could not know our Duty without the Word: and we cannot comply with that Word, without the Assistances of Divine Grace. To damn Men therefore for Breach of Duties, which they could not know, were not a greater Barbarity, than to damn them for not performing those Duties, which they never had Ability to perform. As then God justifies his Proceedings towards Sinners, by condemning them, only for the breach of such things, as they did or might know; so is their Damnation likewise just, because inflicted, only for not doing what they might have done. Consequently, the Grace, as well as the Law, of God must be imparted; though not to every Man in equal Measure, yet in such Measure to every Man, as, all Circumstances considered, might have been sufficient to prevent that Man's Damnation. Consequently again, As the depriving Men of the outward Ministry of the Word is a Punishment, for their neglect or abuse of it; so the withdrawing the inward Assistances of Grace, which stand in an equal degree of Necessity to our Salvation, proceeds from Men behaving themselves negligently, or contemptuously under them. And they do not perish, because they never had good Motions, or Power to be saved; but because, (as the Scripture expresses it) they resist, and quench, and grieve the Holy Spirit; that is, by disappointing and opposing such Motions, they drive him away out of their Hearts; and so provoke God, in this Sense too, *miserably to destroy those wicked Men, and to let out his Vineyard to other, to better, more honest, more diligent, more thankful Husbandmen, who will render him its Fruits in their Season.*

VI. From all this it follows, in the *Last* Place, That Sinners are the Authors, the true and proper Cause, of their own Destruction. They must needs be so, if all the

the Means used for their Advantage, do constantly require and suppose their own Concurrence, to render them successful; and, if the Grace necessary for their Improvement under such Means, be not denied or withheld, till their own Neglect or Unfruitfulness have first provoked God, to leave them destitute of his Succour and Protection. So that, upon the whole Matter, God deals very fairly and bountifully with his Servants. And all those melancholy Fears are vain and Groundless, which some mistaken People perplex themselves withal, as if the Helps, that should enable them to do well, were never, or never would be, afforded to them. We cannot indeed expect, that *that which is Holy should be given to Dogs*, or the most precious of all *Pearls continue always to be cast before Swine*, which *trample them under foot*, and turn the Gift to the Dishonour of the Giver. But, till our Consciences can truly charge us, with wilful Negligence, and gross Contempt; the Promises of the Gospel stand sure, and we may depend up it, that *God will never leave us nor forsake us*. He will not remove our Candlestick, till we have refused to walk by its Light: Nor suffer Error and Impiety to intercept the Lustre of his Truth, till that Truth hath been scornfully cast behind our Backs. He will not forsake or give us up in Temptations, till we have forsaken Him, and cease to strive against them; that is, till our selves take part with the Tempter, to betray and destroy our selves.

Let it therefore be our Care, to discharge Our Part Manfully in this Spiritual Warfare; for we shall be sure to *find Grace to help in time of need*, and our Strength will increase in proportion to our Difficulties, *if we faint not*. The same Blessed Jesus, who appeared to the Martyr of this Day, to support him in his Sufferings, is always ready at hand to succour every sincere and resolute Christian. And no Man yet ever fell from God, who did not fall from his own Stedfastness. Let us
fettle

settle in our Minds a hearty Will to do well; and the whole, in Effect, is done. Let us submit to be taught, and we shall know, what is the acceptable and perfect Will of God. Let us take heed to the fixed Measures of our Duty, and consider the mighty Encouragements we have, to perform it faithfully; the Reasonableness and the Necessity of a Holy Life; and let us set about this important Business without delay; lest the Dishonour, which a scandalous Conversation would reflect upon so excellent a Doctrine, provoke God to *hide the things which belong to our Peace, for ever from our Eyes*. And, if at any time he sees fit to chastise us with Temporal Calamities, or Spiritual Desertions; let us then especially, with Humility and Sorrow, lay our Mouths in the Dust, and acknowledge, that *He is righteous in all that is come upon us, but We and our Doings are wicked*. If then we have any regard to our private or to our publick Happiness, to our present or our future Safety, let us beware, above all things, of hardning our Hearts by Obstinacy, and Contempt of God's Word and Commandment: Lest this should, by degrees, involve us in dark Ignorance, and blind Zeal, and a furious Hatred of Christ and his Ministers. For, wretched, above all Creatures, are those abandoned Men, whom, because they *would not obey the Truth, God gives over to strong Delusions, that they should believe a Lie*. No Symptom is so sad as This. No Case so desperate as Theirs, who do things the most unpardonable, and most highly offensive to God, at the same time, that they falsely imagine themselves doing him the most acceptable Service. Such is the Condition of Them, who first reject, and then persecute the Prophets. Such was Theirs, who stopped Their Ears, and ran upon St. Stephen, as one not fit to live. And the End of such barbarous Outrage, and inflexible Perverseness, will be That in my Text. All that our Saviour then hath left to do, is to bewail the unretrievable Misery of those, who will not suffer them-

R

selves

selves to be rescued from Destruction. And every such Person, or People, will have the justest Occasion to apply to their own most deplorable Circumstances, this most tragical Lamentation, *O how often would my Lord have gathered me, and I would not! Therefore my House is left unto me desolate.* Which wretched State God give us the Grace in due time to prevent, for His Sake, who shed his own Blood to prevent it, Jesus Christ the Righteous. To whom with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, Three Persons and One God, be all Honour and Glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*

St. John the Evangelist's Day.

THE COLLECT.

John i. 4.
Ephes. v. 14.
1 Joh. i. 5, 6, 7.
John xii. 35.
viii. 12.
Colos. i. 12.

Merciful Lord we beseech thee to cast thy bright Beams of Light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the Doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John, may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

I S. John i.

1, 2, 3. The Design of this Epistle is to acquaint you with the Dispensation made use of by God, to bring Men unto Happiness and Life Eternal. A Dispensation, in the Purpose and Decree of God from the Foundation of the World, and wrought by a Person, who was himself God, from all Eternity, foretold and revealed to the Prophets heretofore,

but in this last Age manifested to us, in the plainest and fullest manner that could possibly be. The Author of it becoming incarnate, and conversing with, and instructing us in it. So that our Testimony in this Matter is above all exception,

1. **T**hat which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life:

2. (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.)

3. That which we have seen or heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

ception, leaving no room for Doubt or Deceit, since, for the Truth of what we declare, we have the utmost Evidence, that distinct Knowledge, and Demonstration of Sense, nay the concurring Report of all our Senses, that are qualified to judge of such things, can give us. And therefore what we thus assuredly know, we impart unto You, that ye may be Partakers in the same Blessing; and united, as we are, to God and his Blessed Son both by the same Grace, through Jesus Christ.

4. *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

4. So that your Comfort, and the rendring your Joy in believing com-

plete, is the End aimed at in sending this Epistle

5. *This then is the message that we have heard of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

5. But in order hereunto, 'tis absolutely necessary, you should rightly understand the true Terms, up-

on which this Union stands. For, whatever some vain Pretenders to the highest degrees of it may suggest, the Doctrine given us in Commission to preach, is, that God is a perfectly Holy Being, without the least Blemish, or mixture of Impurity.

6. *If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*

6. 'Tis therefore to no purpose, to boast of being like, or united to Him, (as the Gnosticks do) so

long as we indulge our selves in a vicious course of Life. For all such big Pretensions are false and groundless, and a direct Contradiction to the Gospel.

7. *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

7. The only Proof to be made of this Privilege belonging to us, is such an Imitation of his Holiness, as we are capable of; by

abstaining from all gross habitual and wilful Sins at least; and, and if this be done, the Blood of Jesus Christ will deliver us from the Guilt and Power of all Sin.

8. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us.*

A Mercy, which we even then shall still have need of. For, to suppose

in any Circumstances (much more in such as Theirs) that we are perfectly clear of Sin, is a wretched Delusion, and, in Effect, overturns the whole Scheme of the Gospel.

9. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

9. For this Gospel plainly supposes all Men Sinners; and directs the Confession of their being such, and

a steadfast reliance upon the Truth and Goodness of God, as the proper way to obtain Forgiveness. Since he, who cannot break his Word, hath engaged it, for the Salvation of all truly humble and penitent Sinners.

10. *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

10. So, that for any Man who calls himself a Christian, (but especially

such filthy Creatures as the Gnosticks,) to say, they have been guilty of no Sin,

is to give the lie, not only to themselves, but to God too. 'Tis in Effect, to renounce the Gospel, which declares such Practices as theirs, to be exceeding sinful, and proceeds upon a Supposition, that all Men have been Sinners, and consequently stood in need of that Redemption preached by it.

COMMENT.

IT hath been generally thought, and with great Probability, that this Epistle, though of general use to all Christians, was yet in a more especial manner designed, to refute some very gross and pernicious Errors, which crept very early into the Church. Of these *Simon Magus*, and his immediate Followers, were the First Broachers. But, in process of time, they were improved and refined upon, and made up, all together, that abominable Scheme of Falshood, commonly known, by the

Iren. l. i. c. 16.

24.

Clem. Alex.

Pædag. l. i.

c. 6. p. 107.

Name of the Heresy of the *Gnosticks*. A Sect of Men so called, from the vain Pretensions they made, to extraordinary degrees of Illumination, and Knowledge, not imparted to Christians in common; Such,

as they represented all others incapable of, who were not Partakers in the same detestable Principles and Practices with themselves; And such, as they made their own excelling in, a certain Mark, of their being the truly Spiritual Persons, and of a more intimate Union with God and Christ, by Vertue of his Seed remaining in them, which rendred them his Children in a peculiar manner. To those and sundry other wicked and fantastical Notions, several Expressions in this Epistle seem plainly to allude: Which are the more particular and uncommon, because speaking in the Language and Idiom, familiar to the Persons it was written against. And it was likewise intended to undeceive the honest and Orthodox; whose Simplicity might be liable to Danger, from the pompous Words, and boasted Perfection, of those arrogant Seducers. And therefore I conceive it necessary, in order to a right Explanation of this First Chapter, briefly to observe the false Doctrines, which the several

Parts

Parts of it were in likelihood prepared by the Apostle, as an Antidote, to repel the Force, and draw out the Venom of.

1. Now *First*, Several of those early Hereticks gave out, That Christ did not suffer nor die. Some of them affirmed, that the Senses of those who were present at the Crucifixion, were imposed upon, by a false Appearance of *Jesus* dying on the Cross. Others denied, that *Jesus* and *Christ* (or the *Word*) were the

Iren. adv. Hæ-
ref. L. 1. c. 23.
Cap. 25. *ibid.*
So Cerinthus.
Aug. de Hæref.

same; pretending, that *Christ*, or the *Word*, was a distinct Person or Power, which descended upon *Jesus* at his Baptism, continued with him till his Passion, but then withdrew and left him alone; So that *Jesus* only, but not *Christ*, or the *Word*, was crucified, and died. In opposition to these several Falshoods, (as pernicious as they are groundless) the Apostle begins his Epistle, with a most solemn Declaration of the truth of the Gospel-History concerning this Matter; and that undoubted Evidence, which the Writers and Reporters of it went upon. He asserts, that not one single Sense, but every Sense capable of judging in the Case, had received the utmost Satisfaction. Alluding probably, in more especial manner, to that irrefragable Demonstration of his rising with the self same Body, which they had seen nailed, and wounded, and expire upon the Cross, mentioned by St. Luke, as given to the *Eleven*, when commanded by our Lord to *handle him and see*, whether he had not real Flesh and Bones; and when thereupon *he shewed them his Hands and*

Luke xxiv. 39,
40.

his Feet: And, to that Satisfaction, allowed one doubting Apostle in particular, who was convinced by *thrusting his Hand* into the Wound made by the Spear in our Lord's Side, and *putting his*

John xx. 27.

Finger into the Print of those Nails, that had fastned his *Hands to the Cross*. So that, in this Assurance of our Saviour's rising the same, was included the Assurance

of his dying really, and in all respects, the same Person, with whom they had conversed familiarly, during the whole time of his preaching and working Miracles here on Earth. And therefore *the Blood of Christ is affirmed* in this Chapter *to cleanse us from all Sin*; and Jesus Christ said to be *the Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World*. (Chap. ii. 2.) And *He is called a Liar,*

Chap. ii. 22.

who denies that Jesus is the Christ; Not

only He, who sets up any other against him, but He, who separates, and makes these to be Two distinct Persons. But, whether this were the immediate View of the Apostle or not, his general Aim was certainly to shew, that They, who have left us the Account of our Blessed Lord's Life, and Death, and other Transactions, in Human Nature, did not deliver this rashly or at random; but had such Opportunities, such perfect Knowledge, such abundant Conviction, that no Man can ever hope to be sure of any thing, if They were not sure, that the Facts they related are true. And consequently, all that Credit, which the Consideration of a Relator's not being deceived himself can give to any Testimony, is

Acts i. 3.

Luke i. 3.

due to Theirs upon this Occasion; who, as St. Luke expresses it, had *many infallible Proofs, and a perfect understanding of all*

things written by them.

2. Another Error of those Hereticks consisted in affirming our Lord to be a mere Man, and to have had no existence, before his appearing in our Nature. And against this those Expressions may reasonably be thought levell'd, which call him *the Word of Life, the Life*, and that *Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us*. Phrases,

So Ebion and Cerinthus.

Ver. 1.

Ver. 2.

which, taken by themselves, seem irreconcilable to so mean Notions of him. But, when compared with the beginning of that Gospel written by this Author, and considered with his manner of speaking, can scarce be fairly

fairly interpreted of any thing less than a Divine Being, which this Person, this true (Λόγος ἡ Ζωή) *Word and Life*, had *with the Father*, before the time of his Manifestation to the World.

3. Another Folly observable in those Hereticks, was their vain boasting of a more intimate Communion with God, than any besides were admitted to. And this too, notwithstanding they indulged, and even justified themselves in, the Practice of the most infamous and beastly Vices. All which the Apostle here confronts with that *Fellowship*, which He, and every true Believer, have *with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*. A *Fellowship* so glorious, that it ministers *Fulness of Joy*, Such a Joy, that the noblest and most beneficial End, he could purpose from this Epistle, was the bringing them, to whom it was addressed, to a part in it. But withal, that this could be never effected, without Purity of Life, and an Imitation of those Divine Excellencies, which all, who thought worthily of God, must acknowledge to be in Him; and to be a Pattern, necessary for All to Copy after, who would be dear to, and particularly in Union with, him.

Iren. adv. Hær.
L. I. Cap. I.

Ver. 3.

Ver. 4.

Ver. 5.

Ver. 6.

Ver. 7.

4. A *Fourth*, and yet greater (if any can be greater) Extravagance than the Former, was, That the vilest Abominations left no Stain, contracted no Guilt, in the Persons of Their Sect, That to the Rest indeed, whom in disdain they termed Men of an *Animal* Life and Principle, the Observation of moral Virtues was necessary, and the contrary Vices would be charged to their Account; But for Themselves, who were the only *Spiritual* Persons, They neither did, nor could sin. Their Condition and Privileges exempted them from so mean a Dispensation, as that of Morality; and They could no more be defiled with any Vice

Iren. ubi supra.

they lived in, than the Rays of Light are sullied by shining into a Dunghil, or Gold loses its Value, by mingling with the Filth of a Common-Shore. To this

Ver. 7.

Ver. 8.

Ver. 9.

Ver. 10.

St. *John* opposes the Conditions, upon which the true Christian Fellowship with God and Christ stands. That it is an Endeavour after Perfection, but not the Attainment of an absolute or sinless Perfection, in this Life; That our Freedom from Sin consists in being *cleansed* from it, not in having no need to be cleansed; in *confessing* and being forgiven what we do amiss, not in never doing amiss at all; And, that to assume to our selves the Character of perfect Innocence, is to contradict the express Word of God, and overturn the whole Gospel at once. For this propounds Christ, as the Foundation of our Faith, because the Propitiation for our Sins; and promiseth eternal Salvation, as a Mercy given to the Penitent, but by no means as a Recompence due to the Innocent.

Some may perhaps object against this Application of St. *John's* Words, that the main Assertors of Two or Three Errors here mentioned, were after Him in Time, and consequently we do ill, to suppose this Discourse directed against Opinions, not yet in Being. But this will be of less weight, if we consider, how oft the Fathers accuse these Hereticks, of agreeing in their vicious and sensual Practices, however differing in some Niceties of

Iren. L. 1. Cap.

20, 30, 33. L. 2.

C. 56.

Cyril. Hieros.

Catech. vi.

Aug. cont. Ad-

vers. Leg. &

Proph. L. 2.

C. 12.

Doctrine. The Seeds of all their Errors are frequently declared, to have been sown by *Simon Magnus*, and his immediate Disciples; however Others, who cultivated, and brought them to Maturity, might afterwards be distinguish'd, by the Improvement, or more open avowing, of these Tenets, as though they had been the first Authors and Inventors of them.

Having

HAVING thus briefly observed, what I conceive necessary, for a right understanding of St. *John's* immediate Design; I come now to treat of the Scripture before us, in a greater Latitude, and such as may be of use to our selves, and all Christians in general. To which purpose I shall employ the Remainder of the present Discourse, upon the following Heads.

I. *First*, To prove, that the Advantages of the Gospel are not possible to be attained, without a pure and holy Life.

II. *Secondly*, To shew, That this Holiness and Purity is not so absolute, as to render us, in the present State, free from all manner of Sin. And then,

III. *Thirdly*, To observe, by what Methods we may hope to attain those Advantages; notwithstanding the Remains of Sin, which do, and will, still cleave to the very best of Christians, while they continue here upon Earth.

I. *First*, I shall prove the Advantages of the Gospel not possible to be attained, without a pure and holy Conversation. One would think this so exceeding plain, that there need no Pains to be taken, for convincing any Man, who hath read or heard of the New Testament. For how peremptorily do we find it there declared, That the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in unrighteousness: That the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, hath appeared to all Men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present World; Looking for that blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself

Rom. i. 18.

Tit. ii. 11, 12,
13, 14.

himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works: That our faith must be shewn by our works, and that, though we have all knowledge, and all faith, and have not charity, we are nothing. Nay we are worse than nothing, because He that knows his Master's will, and doth it not, shall be beaten with more stripes. That the adding to our Faith Virtue, and Temperance, and Patience, and Godliness, and Brotherly Kindness, and Charity, and taking Care that these things not only be, but abound in us, is the only Method to prevent our being barren and unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; That Holiness, is that Qualification, without which no Man shall see the Lord; That This is the Will of God, even our Sanctification, that every one of us should know how to possess his Vessel in Cleanness and Honour: Not in the Lusts of Concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That, for the indulging of those Lusts, the Wrath and Vengeance of God, cometh on the Children of Disobedience: And that They, who give ear to such as would persuade them, that it is possible, for any Whoremonger, or Unclean Person, or Abuser of himself with Mankind, or Thief, or covetuous Man, or Drunkard, or Reviler, or Extortioner, to inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God, are grossly ignorant in the Terms of their Salvation, and suffer themselves to be deceived with vain words.

Jam. ii. 14. ^{so}
26.

I Cor. xiii. 2.

Luc. xii. 47, 48.

2Pet. i. 5, 6, 7, 8.

Heb. xii. 14.

I Theff. iv. 3,
4, 5.

Coloff. iii. 6.

I Cor. vi. 9, 10.
Ephes. v. 5, 6.

I should never make an end, did I go about to set before you all the Passages of Scripture, that might be produced to the same purpose. But for this there is no occasion. For, what farther Satisfaction can any reasonable Man desire in the Point, than such express Declarations, as these already alledged, that an impure and wicked Life is a direct Contradiction to the main End

of revealing the Gospel ; That it opposes and defeats the Design of our Blessed Saviour's coming into the World ; That it renders the most exalted Degrees of Knowledge and Faith of no Account, and turns what was meant our Privilege into the heaviest Article of our Condemnation ; That it incapacitates Men for all that Bliss and Reward, proposed for their Encouragement, and exposes Christians to the same Indignation and Punishment, with the vilest and darkest Heathens. For it matters not much what a Man is in Profession, if he still continue a Heathen in Practice. Matters not? Yes, such Professors aggravate their Guilt, by living in Defiance of their own Principles, dishonouring the Name of a Christian, which they vainly take to themselves ; and, by their Deeds of Darkness, abusing and reproaching that Light, which, while they fondly boast of, they yet refuse to be directed, and to walk by.

One would wonder indeed, which way it should come to pass, that Men, who think at all, should ever be prevailed upon, by a Delusion so fatal, and in a Case so exceeding plain. Which how to Account for I cannot well tell, otherwise than by saying, That the acquiring of Knowledge offers Violence to none of our sensual Inclinations, but is an agreeable Entertainment to the Mind ; That the Improvements of this Kind are, what every body is not equally capable of ; And therefore, as this is a Distinction, more visible and more easy to us, than that of subduing our Lusts and Passions, and excelling in moral Virtues, the Exercise and Habits whereof People of meaner Parts and Attainments may come up to us in : So the affecting to distinguish our selves this way, flatters our Vanity, and falls in with that very Corruption of human Nature, which the Increase of Knowledge was intended for a Remedy against. This seems to be a sort of Reason, for Men's valuing themselves so highly, upon abstruse and uncommon Speculations in general, and in Religion in particular ; for lay-
ing

ing so much more weight, and bestowing so much more Pains, upon the Brightness of the Understanding, than upon the Rectitude of the Will. Not considering, in the mean while, how very distant these Notions are from the End of Religion. For Religion's Business is to amend the World, by making Men better rather than wiser; by making them in Truth wiser, that they may thereby be enabled to be better. Religion's constant Voice is in Effect that of our Blessed Master, *If ye know*

John xiii. 17.

these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

Since by barely knowing the very best things and resting there, neither are our selves, nor others (truly speaking) happier. Religion's highest Excellence is to restore the defaced Image of our Maker upon our Souls, and by refreshing that Likeness here, to fit us for the Enjoyment of the Original hereafter. But still the manner of provoking us to this Imitation, is by proposing such of his Excellencies for our Pattern, as represent, not the Largeness of his Mind, but the Purity and

1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

Beneficence of his Nature. *As he which*

bath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of Conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy; and again, Be ye merci-

Luke vi. 36.

ful, as your Father also is merciful. Which

Places leave us no difficulty for understanding our Blessed Lord's Meaning, though somewhat more ambiguously express'd, when he commands his Disciples to be

Matth. v. 48.

Perfect, even as their Father which is in Heaven is Perfect.

But are we then able to aspire to such a Likeness, even in these Respects, as should, in any Exactness of Proportion, answer to those Commands? Is not God in Heaven, and We upon Earth? And can there be any Comparison between his Lustre and Glory, who (as the

1 Cor. 15.

Apostle says here) is Light, and in Him is no Darkness at all; and that dim Shine of

the brightest human Virtue, which, if put in the Balance

lance with Him, is but a very few Removes from Darkneſs? No certainly. And therefore it was, that I propoſed to ſhew, under my

II. *Second Head*, That even the Holineſs and Purity required under the Goſpel-State, is not ſo abſolute, as to preſerve us, in the preſent Condition of things, free from all manner of Sin. That no mere Mortal muſt expect to be ſo happy, is a Thing, that proves it ſelf. And therefore, inſtead of thoſe Teſtimonies, whereby the Scriptures ſtrengthen this Melancholy Reflection, by asking, *Who can ſay, I have made my Heart*

clean, I am pure from my Sin? But pro-

Prov. xx. 9.

nouncing, that *there is none righteous, no*

Pſal. xiv. 1.

not one; that there is not a Man upon

Eccleſ. vii. 20.

Earth who doeth good and ſinneth not;

and that *Death hath paſſed upon all Men,*

Rom. v. 12.

in that all have ſinned. Inſtead, I ſay, of

theſe, and many ſuch like, though full and undeniable,

yet ſomewhat more foreign Proofs; I would make

ſhorter work, by ſending Men to their own Breasts for

Conviction. For he, that at all acquaints himſelf, what

paſſes at home, muſt be exceeding partial and vain, not

to ſee Cauſe for including his own Caſe, in the Num-

ber of Them, to whom thoſe Words of this Apoſtle

belong, *If we ſay that we have no Sin, we deceive our*

ſelves, and the Truth is not in us.

That then, which I apprehend of much greater Importance, is to put Men in Mind, whence that Unhappineſs proceeds. Of which it may ſuffice to give this ſhort Account.

God, as the *Preacher* very well obſerves, *made Man upright, but they have ſought out many*

Eccleſ. vii. 29.

Inventions. Our firſt Parents were left in

the Hand of their own Counſel, free to fall, but yet able

to ſtand. This Power of perfect Choice, abuſed to Evil,

was ſo ordered, as to draw on, not only perſonal Guilt,

but

but a Depravation, both of the Understanding, and Affections. After these Infirmities, thus contracted, it was, that all Mankind sprung from them: Who consequently must partake of the Filth and Frailties of their common Source. So that none of their Posterity are any longer the same, that either *Adam* was at first, or that *Eve*, was, who took her Substance from him, before he had transgress'd. The Appetites of the lower Soul (as some distinguish) are in perpetual Disposition to rebel; and there is a Bias, even upon Reason it self, drawing us down to the Animal Life and its Gratifications, against our better Sense, and the much more weighty Arguments, that plead, but are not so well heard, for the Spiritual. In the Latter consists our Duty and Happiness, in the Former, our Guilt and Danger. Our Danger at all Times; because by indulging our sensual Appetites, even within measure, they are apt to get ground upon us; Our Guilt, as many times as we gratify them, beyond measure, or in opposition to the Dictates of Reason and Religion. This renders our Lord's Reflection upon his Disciples, applicable to all his Followers,

Matt. xxvi. 41.

that, in the Hour of Temptation, Watchfulness and Prayer are indispensably necessary, because, even when *the Spirit* is most willing, *the Flesh* is found by sad Experience weak. This is in Substance St. Paul's meaning, by the *Warrings of the Mind*, the *Lustings of the Spirit against the Flesh*, and *the Flesh against the Spirit*, of which he often complains. And the

Rom. vii. 23.

Gal. v. 16, 17.

Difference between one Man and another, in this respect, is not, that the Bad have these Lustings and Weaknesses, and the Good have not; that the Bad are always vanquished in the War, and the Good never: But that the One follows the Stream of his vitiated Affections, and the Other strives against it. The Bad takes part with the Enemy against himself, and the Good either withstands so manfully as to conquer; Or, if over-

come

come by Surprize, or violent Assault, rallies again; and never makes the least Truce with a Foe, from whom nothing, he knows, can save him, but continual and obstinate Resistance.

Hence is it, that *in many things we offend all*; In many, done amiss, which ought not, need not, to have been committed: In Many, Jam. iii. 2. not done well, which might have been performed, and should not have been neglected. And, all this notwithstanding, we are called upon to walk *in the Light, as God is in the Light*, because Ver. 6. the keeping so glorious an Example in view will animate our Endeavours, after the utmost Perfection we are capable of attaining. And we are esteemed to *walk in the Light, as He is in the Light*, when we avoid and abhor Darkness and its Deeds; and so demean ourselves, that our Blemishes and Faults are not from the Perverseness of our Will, but from the Imperfections and Frailties of our Nature. For, were there no such Distinction, as this to be made, how fruitless, how impertinent were it for St. John, to tell Men of a *Fellowship with God and Christ*; A Fellowship to be maintained by being like to God; and yet, to tell these Men, that they are Sinners? It therefore follows evidently, that all Sinners, in the largest Sense of that Word, are not shut out from the Advantages of the Gospel, which makes it of great Use rightly to understand my

III. *Third Head.* What Methods those Advantages are secured by, notwithstanding the Remains of Sin, which do, and always will, cleave to the very Best of Christians, while they continue here upon Earth. Of this we are informed *Ver. 7. The Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all Sin*: and yet somewhat more particularly at the 9th Verse, *If we confess our Sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our Sins, and to cleanse us from all Unrighteousness.* The Sum of both

both which Texts may be reduced to Two Points: One, That to the alone Sufferings and Death of Christ Mens Deliverance from their Sins, and the dismal Consequents of them, is truly owing: The Other, That this Deliverance is not afforded to all Sinners promiscuously, but requires some Conditions to qualify us for it. These are, each of them, Points too copious to be treated of in their due extent at present, and therefore I will but just leave them upon you with some brief Observations: Such especially, as are most apposite to what hath been delivered, under the foregoing Particulars.

1. *First*, As the Effect of *Christ's Blood* is here represented by *Cleansing*, it argues, not only, that Sin is the Stain and Defilement of our Nature, but refers us also to the Sprinklings of the Blood of the Levitical Sacrifices, for a right Understanding of the Benefit Christians reap by it. Now the Legal Pollutions, under that Oeconomy, did cut Men off from all Friendship with God, till the Lustrations, appointed for each Case, had pass'd upon the Body of the Person contracting them. In like manner, our Souls are looked upon as sullied, and abominable in the Sight of God, till the Application of the Blood of this only meritorious Sacrifice hath washed them from their Filth. Again, The Mark of Men being then in Favour and Friendship with God was their Right of coming into his Presence, approaching his Altar, and communicating in his Worship, with the rest of their Brethren: And thus Christians, under the Gospel, are then in Communion with God, when they lead such Lives, as qualify them for an acceptable Participation, in those Services and Privileges, which are the Glory of the true Members of Christ's Body, the Church. This makes it, upon the Matter, Indifferent, whether we read those Words at the Seventh Verse, *Then have we Fellowship with one another*, or (as some Copies) *Then have we Fellowship with Him*: Since Communion with true Christians is Communion with God; and They, *who walk*

walk not in the Light, that is, who lead not the Lives of Christians, however they may seem to be, yet are not really, united, either to the One, or the Other.

2. *Secondly*, There is this Pre-eminence due to the Blood of Jesus Christ, above any thing directly typified of it, by the Purifications under the Law: That, whereas Those had all a respect to Faults already pass'd, This looks forward; and is of mighty Efficacy for the Time to come. It was our Propitiation, and thus it procures our Pardon from the Guilt of Sin; but it hath likewise purchased for us the Grace and Assistances of the Holy Spirit, and thus it arms and relieves us against the Power of Sin. For this Spirit is the Earnest and Proof of our Adoption: The *sending* it *forth into our Hearts* is expressly said to be a Consequence of our Sonship. But that Sonship is again the Consequence of our Deliverance from Bondage; And this Deliverance is as expressly ascribed to that Death of His, which destroyed Him, that had the Power of Death, and, till this had burst our Chains, held us in Fear and Slavery. So truly may that Blood be said to *cleanse*, whose Vertue does not only wash out the Old, but preserve us from returning to our Mire, and prevents the taking New, Stains.

Rom. viii. 15.

Gal. iv. 3, 4,

5, 6.

Heb. ii. 14, 15.

3. *Thirdly*, This shews us the exceeding Goodness, as well as the Justice, of Almighty God, in contriving such Means for restoring our Happiness, as leave no reasonable Imputation upon the Hardship of losing it. The Defects and Disabilities, which indispose us to Goodness, and render a perfect Obedience now impossible, were derived down to us from Another: The Repair of these Ruins of Nature by Grace, The Acceptance of an Obedience imperfect, when sincere, The Remission of our Faults, and Compassion for our Failings, are likewise derived down upon us from Another.

The Misery was not personally our own Act; the Rescue from it is not our own

Rom. v. 12, 19.

neither. Thus far the Cases are at least equal, and the Justice of God vindicated. But the Differences, which illustrate his Goodness upon this Occasion, are manifest and great. The Offence, by which Judgment came upon us was One, was actually Anothers, and Ours, only as naturally included in that common Representative. But the Righteousness, by which Justification comes upon us, is not that of any natural Parent. It is no farther Ours, than as we are, by a most gracious Construction, reckoned to partake with Him, not from whom We came, but who came to Us; One, who condescended to assume our Human, that so we might be admitted to a Share of His Divine, Nature. Nor was this Justification from our Original alone, but from Actual, from our Own, from Wilful, from Infinite, as the Apostle says here, *from All, Sin*. At least it may, it must be so, provided we be not wanting to our selves. For that should be taken Care of. We have done a great deal to make our selves wretched, and to break with God; and something is still left for us to do, in order to retrieving our Bliss, and returning into Friendship with Him: And how inexcusable we are, if this be left undone, will appear

4. *Fourthly*, From the Condition required at the 9th Verse, *If we confess our Sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our Sins, and to cleanse us from all Unrighteousness*. That the true Purport of this Condition be not mistaken, it is fit we remember, that nothing is more usual in Scripture, than to express a Man's Duty, by some very considerable Branch of it. Thus the Whole of Religion is often implied, in the Love, or the Fear, of God. And thus Confession here no doubt denotes, not only an Acknowledgment of our Faults, but all that deep Humility and Shame, All that afflicting Sorrow and Self-condemnation, All that Resolution against them, All that effectual forsaking them for the future, All that Diligence to grow, and abound, in the contrary Virtues and Graces, All that entire Dependence on the Merits and

and Sacrifice of our crucified Redeemer, All that Application of his Word and Sacraments, ordained to convey this cleansing Blood to us; which accompany such Acknowledgment, when serious and to purpose, and which are elsewhere represented, as constituent Parts of Repentance, and necessary Predispositions to Forgiveness. In the mean while, as the mention of this singly was sufficient, so was no part of Repentance so proper to be mentioned as This. For it was directed to Persons, vain and absurd enough, to suppose themselves void of Sin, and thereby evacuating, so far as in them lay, the whole Gospel of Christ. For the Gospel propounds a Salvation to all Men, to be obtained only by his Death. A Death, undergone on purpose that it might propitiate for Sin, and consequently a Death, needless to them who had no Sin. A Death of none effect to Any, who do not allow the Necessity, and trust to the Virtue, of it, for the Remission of their own Sins. But, to all who do, so beneficial, that God can as soon renounce his Word, as disappoint their reasonable Expectations. His Promise is pass'd, and he is *faithful*. The Judge of all the Earth cannot but do right. His Son hath paid the Debt, and He is *just*. He will not therefore require from the Principal, what the Surety hath already discharged. So sure are we to be happy, if we be but sensible, how miserable we have made our selves. So sure to be miserable, if puffed up with vain Confidences in our own real Impotence; and insensible, that to *Jesus Christ* alone, we owe the very Possibility of our being happy.

Let then these Considerations be so laid together, that the result of them all may be that Fulness of a solid and well grounded Joy, which the Apostle of this Day designed the Words, from whence they have been taken, should diffuse, through every Soul that receives them. Let us hold in highest Estimation that Privilege, which is indeed inestimable; The Mystical Union with

God the Father and his Blessed Son ; The most valuable Ingredient of a Believer's both present and future Happiness, and therefore the best Ingredient of his present, because the Earnest and undoubted Pledge, of his future, and eternal. But let us consider withal, that, to be united to God supposes a Likeness to him, in all those Excellencies that are imitable by Creatures ; and in all those Proportions, to which such Creatures as We, can raise our poor imperfect, and still sinful, selves. For such, we must remember, we yet are ; even after our most sincere, our most successful, Endeavours to be Holy. And therefore, as we must not presume upon the Promises and

2 Cor. vii. 1. Love of God, without *cleansing our selves from all filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, and perfecting Holiness in his Fear*: So neither must we forget, that all our Cleanness is from *Him,*

Rev. i. 5.

who hath washed us in his own Blood ; that

Humility, and taking shame for our Sins, and acknowledging our own Unworthiness, as they are most suitable to our Circumstances, so are they most for our Advantage. There being no Instance, which does more remarkably, than this of recommending to the Favour, and entitling to the Mercy of God, make good that Maxim

Luke xiv. 11.

of our Blessed Master, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that hum-*

bleth himself shall be exalted.

And, if these Considerations, and their Effects, can be more seasonable at one time than another ; Is there any fitter Opportunity for them, than the Festival we now celebrate ? When the beloved Disciple does, as it were, again lean on his Lord's Breast ; and join our Praises for the Virtues of the Servant, with our Adorations for the Birth of the Master ? That Birth, which was so circumstantiated, as to intimate how detestable Sin and Sensuality is to him ; That Birth, which *manifested the Life,* till then *hid in God,* that we might thenceforth live in, and by, and to Him. That Birth, which is so full

full of Confusion to the Proud and Arrogant; to those that do not, or that will not, see their Vileness and Frailty; But so full of Comfort, and Holy Trust to the Penitent and the Humble. For, Them, that feel and acknowledge their own Misery and Pollution, this new born Saviour will cleanse by his Blood; Them, that lament and labour against their own Infirmities, he will assist and strengthen by his Grace. Let us then cast our selves entirely upon Him, who, had he not loved us, would neither have taken, nor shed, his Blood for us. Approach him, as your only Trust and Refuge. For, what else can you place your Confidence in? Not in Men, though they may appear to be something, for no *Man may re-* Psal. xlix. 7.

deem the Soul of his Brother, or make Atonement unto God for him. Not in your Selves, whom you may soon know to be nothing. Nothing at the best, since all the Evil in you is worse than so, and all the Good is no better than so. For, let you *have laboured* never so abundantly, still it was not you, but the Grace of God that is in you. 1 Cor. xv. 10.

A Grace given to the Humble; A Spiritual Sustenance, of which the *Poor in Heart shall eat and be satisfied, and their Soul shall live for ever*; while the conceitedly Rich and Full, the Men who think they want it not, though then they want it most, shall be sent empty away. Shut not then the Door of Mercy against your selves, by false Notions of your own Righteousness: But give the Glory of your cleansing to that inestimable Blood, which alone can take away Sin; and be careful so to value the Blessing, as never to forfeit again that Fellowship, *which the Father and his Son Jesus Christ* hereby vouchsafe to receive you into. A Fellowship of Holiness here; But that, alas! imperfect, and too often interrupted; Yet this to be compleated in a Fellowship hereafter in Heaven, of Happiness immutable, endless, and inexpressible. Whither God of his infinite Mercy

bring us, in his due time, to whom be Honour and Glory henceforth for evermore. *Amen.*

THE GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

St. John xxi. 19.

19. After Jesus had thrice required from Peter a Profession of loving him (thus to make some sort of Reparation for his having thrice denied him) and foretold his Martyrdom, for the Glory of God, and the Truth of the Gospel; He riseth out of his Place, and putting himself into motion, commands Peter to follow him.

19. *JESUS said unto Peter, Follow me.*

20. Peter did as he was bidden, and John, (for he is the Person meant here,) though not bidden, did so too.

20. *Then Peter turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved, following, (which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?)*

21. Which Peter observing, and being curious to know, how a Person so familiar with, and particularly dear to our Lord, should be disposed of, asks what should become of Him.

21. *Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?*

22. To this Question Jesus did not think fit to return any direct Answer; But such an one, as check'd St. Peter's Curiosity, by commanding him to look well to the discharge of his own Duty, without troubling himself about the Fate in reserve for other People; which was no part of his Concern.

22. *Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*

23. From this ambiguous manner of our Lord's expressing himself, some of the Disciples imagined, that St. John should never die, but be found among those that shall be alive at Christ's Second Coming. (See 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52. 1 Thess. iv. 17.) Whereas, in Truth, those Words of Jesus imply no such Matter (but if they determine any thing, which they seem rather not to do) foretel, that that Disciple should survive the Destruction of Jerusalem; which is probably believed to be called our Lord's Coming (as a most eminent Judgment, and Instance of his Truth and Power) in sundry Places of the New Testament.

23. *Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said unto him, He shall not die; but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?*

24. Now the Person, concerned in the Account that went before, is the very Author of this Gospel; whose Credit may very safely be depended upon,

24. *This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.*

25. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

25. For he hath been so far from exceeding, that he does indeed come short of, the Truth.

The Miracles and memorable Actions related here, being so small a part of those done by Jesus; that (to use a Figure of Speech very common and allowable on such Occasions) the whole of them is not possible to be told; or to be comprehended, if it could be told.

COMMENT.

IN order to do right, both to the Festival, which the Church of Christ this Day celebrates, and to the Portion of Scripture propounded here, as a proper Subject for our Meditation upon it, I shall first give a brief Account of the Saint we are now commemorating, and then consider this Passage, so far as it concerns Him in particular.

St. *John* was the Son of *Zebedee*, and Brother of *James*, called (by distinction from another of the same Name, and an Apostle likewise) *James the Great*. His Mother was *Salome*, mentioned by St. *Mark* to have been one of those devout Women, who, having ministered to *Jesus* in *Galilee*, and waited on him in his Journey from thence to *Jerusalem*, were present at his Crucifixion, and prepared Spices to anoint his dead Body. But, when they came with that Intent to the Sepulchre, they saw a Vision of Angels, who gave them the first joyful News of his being risen again. The Place of his Birth was one of the Sea-Towns in *Galilee*, probably *Bethsaida*, or *Capernaum*. There he, together with his Father and Brother, exercised the Fishing-Trade, till called off by our Lord, to be from thenceforth one of his constant Attendants. For the ready Obedience to which Call, (express'd by leaving his Ship and his Father and forthwith following *Jesus*) he seems to have been prepared, by the previous Instructions

Matth. iv. 21.

Mark xv. 40.

xvi. 1.

Compare Matth.

xxvii. 56.

Mat. iv. 21, 22.

of *John* the Baptist. It being probably concluded, from the manner of his Speech, when he hath occasion to mention himself in the Gospel of his own writing, that He was *that other Disciple*, who is said, in the John i. 35, to 40. First Chapter, to have been present with *Andrew*, when *John* declared *Jesus* to be *the Lamb of God*, and thereupon to have followed him, to the Place of his Abode. But afterwards, 'tis certain, he returned to his Calling. And therefore this Invitation, and the Compliance with it, was quite different, both in Time and Nature, from that at the Sea of *Galilee*. For our Saviour had then actually entred upon the Exercise of his Prophetick Office; and made choice of Him, and his Brother *James*, among those Disciples, which he began to gather to himself.

Among these, he was not only One of the Twelve Apostles; but One of the Three, even of that Number, distinguished by particular Marks of Favour above the rest. To these, that is, to *Peter*, this Apostle, and his Brother *James*, our Blessed Lord gave Surnames. To

these Two Brethren, that of *Sons of Thunder*; denoting, possibly, the Powerfulness of their Ministry. Which Title might have regard, Either to its Efficacy upon the Minds of the Hearers; Or to the undaunted Courage of the Speakers; Or to the Depth of those Mysteries they should teach, as from the *Voice of God*; for so Thunder was wont to be esteem'd and call'd. To These our Lord allowed a part, in some of those more private Miracles and Retirements, to which the other Apostles had not the Honour of being admitted. Thus, in the restoring *Jairus* his Daughter to Life,

Luke viii. 51.

when he came to the House, no Man was suffered to go in with him, save *Peter*, and *James*, and *John*, and the Father and Mother of the Maiden. When he thought fit to exhibit a Specimen of the Excellence of his Glory, in his

Matth. xvii.

2 Pet. i. 16.

x7, 18.

wonderful Transfiguration on the Holy

Mount;

Mount; These were made choice of to be *Eye-witnesses of his Majesty*, present at his Conference with *Moses* and *Elias*, and Hearers of that Voice, which declared him the *beloved Son of God*. And again, when the Sorrows of his Soul were enlarged, and his Human Nature almost overwhelmed, with the Load of Sufferings which he saw then attacking him; These were the only Companions of his Solitude, and most retired Devotions. Thus whatever was most remarkable in their Blessed Master's Actions, which he saw convenient for a Season to conceal, was deposited as a Secret in these faithful Hands. The most convincing Evidences of his Godhead and his Manhood, the brightest Lustre of the One, and the lowest Humiliation of the Other. All indeed, that could speak a particular Confidence and Kindness, was reserved for a Retreat with those select Friends; Of whom, though so few, St. *John* had constantly the Privilege to make One.

Matth. xxvi.

Mark v. 43.

Matth. xvii. 9.

Nay, even of those Three, he seems, in some Respects, to have the Preference. To be known by that most desirable of all Titles, *The Disciple whom Jesus loved*; To have such Intimacy and Interest with this Blessed Master, as should put the rest of his Brethren upon choosing Him their Spokesman, for getting Satisfaction to a Question, which none of Them durst ask, though all were in pain to have it resolved. These were such Honours as St. *John* might well desire to be remembered by. Ten thousand pompous Titles had swell'd indeed his Gospel, but in Substance added nothing to the Character of the Author, or the Credit of the Work, comparable to this short Description of himself in the Scripture now under Consideration, *The Disciple whom Jesus loved, which also leaned on his Breast at Supper, and said, which is He that betrayeth thee? This is the Disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things.*

Ver. 20, 24.

But

But of this I may have occasion to take notice by and by. At present I only add, that a more convenient Proof of his particular Affection could scarce be given, than that of committing to this Disciple's Comfort and Care, his Sorrowful Holy Mother; The tenderest Concern of that kind to be sure, and such, as even the Agonies of Death, and the Cross, could not yet render the best and meekest of Sons unmindful of.

What the Reasons might be of our Lord's Favour to St. *John*, in a Degree so visible and so particular, as should give him right to a Title, which otherwise it would have favoured too much of invidious and arrogant boasting, to assume to himself, we are no where in Scripture told. Of those, who have undertaken to conjecture, Some have attributed it to this Apostle's eminent Modesty, Others to his unspotted Chastity, Others think it an Indulgence due to his Youth, and the Pregnancy of that in Knowledge and Virtue; But None seem to have thought more probably of the Matter, than they, who impute this Affection and Indulgence, to nearness of Relation, and a peculiar Sweetness of Disposition, conspiring to recommend him. The Former, though so close, at that of being Sister's, or Cousin-German's Son to our Lord, had not alone indeed been Cause sufficient, for Preference in the good Graces of such a Master. (The signifying

Matth. xx. 20,

23.

* *Gospel for*
St. James's
Day.

this might possibly be part of our Lord's Meaning, in his Answer to that Famous Request of this Apostle and his Mother, to be considered hereafter * in due Place.)

But the Latter, wherein both the constant Strain of his own Writings and the concurrent Testimonies of all Antiquity, declare him to have excelled; might well be allowed to render him very dear to that Lord, who is Love it self. And such Likeness of Disposition, attended with such Proximity in Blood, As it is a natural and reasonable Motive, for some Difference to be made; (and therefore not unbecoming even the Son

of God made Man) So was it no Disparagement to the rest of the Apostles, whose Circumstances, in either of these respects were not alike, that a greater Intimacy and Freedom uncommon should be permitted to St. *John*. Thus He, who *loved all his own, and loved them unto the End*, did yet discover somewhat of Inequality in his Likings and Conversations; Enough to prove himself of the same Human Affections with Us; Enough to justify One, from among his most familiar Friends, in the Honour of signalizing his Memory to all Ages, and leaving no Manner of doubt, who was pointed at, by *The Disciple whom Jesus loved*.

John xiii. 1.

But, though the Holy Ghost did not think fit to acquaint us with the particular Motives, he hath not spared to record the grateful Resentments, of this Love. Those were express'd in many Instances of fervent Zeal for the Honour, returns of Tenderness for the Person, and undaunted Courage in the Service, of so kind a Master. The First of these indeed we find our Lord twice rebuking. Once, as too nicely jealous, when forbidding one to proceed in casting out Devils, tho' he did it in Christ's Name, because he was not one of his Retinue. A Second time, when the Affront of not receiving *Jesus* in a Samaritan Village, had provoked His, and his Brother's Indignation, to ask, whether Fire should not be call'd down from Heaven, to make them such another Example of despising a Great Prophet, as God had once suffered *Elijah* to make, of some, who contemned His Authority. In both which Cases, this Heat must be ascribed to the over-hastiness of an honest, but not sufficiently instructed, Zeal; And our Lord's Reproofs accordingly shew such want of Temper to have proceeded, from want of such Judgment and Consideration; as afterwards calmed this Disciple into Meekness and Charity, and left him so far from desiring to promote his Master's

Luke ix. 49, 50.

Ver. 51, 56.

2 Kings i.

Master's Honour, by the Danger and Death of Others ;
 as to declare it his Duty, to purchase the
 Lives and Safeties of the Brethren with the
 Sacrifice of his own ; and this too, as the
 best and most becoming Expedient, for approving the
 Sincerity of his Gratitude and Love to Christ.

The tender Concern he bore to his Lord's Person, appears abundantly from his Behaviour, at a time most proper for making Proof of it : That of his Master's Sufferings and Disgrace. And here I will not Venture to carry this Proof so high as some have done, by affirming St. *John* to be that Young Man, who, when *Jesus* was apprehended in the Garden, followed with a Linen Cloth cast about his Body, and afterwards escaped from those in pursuit of him, by quitting his Garment, and fleeing naked. As the Scripture hath not, So the Reasons of those that have, fixed this upon St. *John*, are not, to my Apprehension, sufficient to balance those on the contrary. The Name of *Young Man*, as commonly then used, could not well belong to St. *John*. Who, dying about Sixty eight Years after our Lord, by Computation the Ninety eighth or Ninety ninth of his own Age, must have been now upwards of Thirty ; tho' younger than any other of the Apostles. Not only so, but this Apostle himself tells us, Our Lord treated with the Officers, for the safe Dismission of those with him ; And that Allowance They took the Advantage of. For, after the time of *Simon Peter's* wounding the High-Priest's Servant, and the Wound healed by our Saviour, is to be understood the Disciples shifting for themselves to follow, as St. *Mark* hath placed it. And that general Expression seems to include St. *John*, when the same Evangelist, at the Verse before, says, *They all*, that is, (as St. *Matthew*) *all the Disciples forsook him and fled*. Whereupon immediately follows this Account of the Young Man ;
 such

1 John iii. 16.
 iv. 11.

Mark xiv. 51.

Mark xiv. 50.
 Matt. xxvi. 56.
 See Cajetan.
 Jantac. vi.
 Qu. 4.

Such as, I should imagine, refers not to the Particulars of the Flight of One among the *All* before-mentioned; but rather to a Person and Action distinct from Theirs, and another Incident, that happened at the seizing of Jesus by *Judas* and his Company.

Some greater Appearance there is (whether we regard the Phrase used in relating it, or the Authority of those Interpreters who give into it) that St. *John* was that other Disciple, who accompanied *Peter* to the High-Priest's Palace; and, by his Acquaintance in the Family, got Him admitted in, to see what was done to *Jesus*. Though his Affection, which had brought him thither, was, St. *Chrysostom* thinks, too weak for his Fear; and, that he could not yet conquer this so far, as to suffer himself to stay in a Place of so much Danger.

John xviii. 15,
16.

Compare Ch. xx.
3, 4, 8.

However that were, we find him afterwards more Master of this Passion; attending our Blessed Lord at his Crucifixion, in Company with his Holy and Afflicted Mother; taken Notice of by him in his last Moments and dying Agonies, receiving that Mother as his own Charge, and conducting her to his own home. With whom, some Historians tell us, he lived in *Jerusalem*, till the time of her Death, which they compute to have been about Fifteen Years after.

John xix. 26,
27.

After our Saviour's Resurrection, He was the first Apostle, who came to his empty Tomb; running thither, upon the Intelligence brought to Him and *Peter*, that the Stone was taken away, and the Sepulchre open; And, out-running *Peter*, though not entering into it, till *Peter* had first led the way. But then, he also took a careful View of all the Circumstances of the Place, the Clothes, and the Manner how they were disposed; and upon his return profess'd the full Conviction, which this View had given him.

John xx. 3, 8.

John xxi. 6.

When our Lord appeared to his Disciples at the Sea of *Galilee*, He was the first who discerned it was *Jesus*; and gave notice of it to *Simon Peter*, between Whom and Him, there seems to have been all along a more particular Intimacy and Friendship. At *Peter's* Request it was, that *John* under-

John xiii. 24.

took to ask of our Lord, who it was that should betray him. And in Concern for *John* it was, that *Peter*, when given to understand by

John xxi. 21.

what Death he himself should glorify God, had the unreasonable Curiosity, to demand what that Man should do. These were the Two, sent by

Luke xxii. 8.

John xx. 2.

Acts iii, iv, v.

our Lord before him to prepare the Passover: These the Two, sought out by *Mary Magdalene*, to impart the News of the Grave being open: These the Two, who

after the Descent of the Holy Spirit, went up together into the Temple, and there cured the impotent Man; These justified their preaching in the Name of *Jesus*, and declared their Resolution to persist in doing so; suffered Imprisonment with the rest of their Brethren, rejoiced, that they were counted worthy of Shame, upon

Chap. viii.

so glorious an Occasion: These were made choice of by the rest of their Body, to go and Confirm the new Converts at *Samaria*, who had been instructed in the Faith of Christ, by the preaching of *Philip*. And, Lastly, These Two and *James* are said to be esteemed Pillars. From Them, *St. Paul* declares,

Gal. ii. 9, 10.

he received the right hand of Fellowship at *Jerusalem*; and, that with Them it was agreed, what part he should take in the Propagation of the Gospel. All which are Instances, that speak a more than ordinary Union between these Two Yoke-fellows, a mighty Deference to their Authority, and an invincible Courage putting them forward, and, as it were, leading on their Brethren, as oft as any Encounter of Hardship, for the Service of their Master, offered itself to them.

And

And This is the *Third* good Quality I instanced in, as a Testimony, how desirous our Apostle was to make some becoming Returns of that Love, whereof he partook so largely.

No doubt he did the same, in the succeeding Years of his Life. Tho' the Scripture have left us no farther Intimation of it, than that Address, made to the Churches of the Lesser *Asia*; Which makes it probable, that his Labours had been bestowed in founding Some, and confirming Others, of them. Of the Latter sort might possibly be *Laodicea*. But certainly * *Ephesus* was, where we read of St. *Paul* first propagating the Gospel, and leaving the Care of the Church there to *Timothy*, the first Bishop of it. The other Five, mentioned in the *Revelation*, are generally thought to derive their Being from St. *John*: Who is likewise believed to have preached in *Parthia*: His first Epistle anciently bearing the Title, of *The Epistle to the Parthians*. His chief Residence seems to have been at *Ephesus*: A City of exceeding great resort, both upon the account of its Traffick, and the Convenience of its Port, to Travellers, from the Parts of *Syria* and *Egypt*; or thither from *Greece*, *Macedonia*, and *Pontus*, &c. So that the Apostle could nowhere be seated more commodiously, for dispersing the Knowledge of his Doctrines, to Natives of several Nations, and Quarters, at once.

After many (some say twenty seven) Years spent here, he was, by Order of *Domitian*, (who had then set on foot a severe Persecution) sent to *Rome*; and there, as *Tertullian* relates (in a manner importing the Fact abundantly notorious) cast into a Cauldron of burning * Oil. But God, who had reserved him for farther Services to the Truth, brought him safe out of it. The Emperor, unmoved at this miraculous Deliverance, banish'd him into *Patmos*, a small Island in the *Archipelago*.

* Iren. Lib. iii.
Cap. 3.
Acts xix.
1 Tim. i.

* Tertull. calls
it Oleum igneum,
Lib. de Præscript.
cont. Hæret.

Rev. i. 9.

lago. Here it was, that those Visions were, many of them, if not all, manifested to him; and here, that the Ancients say, they were written too, in that Book called his *Revelation*. For the Place,

Lib. 5. c. 30.

we have his own Testimony; for the Time, that of *Irenæus*, who puts it near the End of *Domitian's* Reign. But a modern Critick of great

Grotius in Apoc.

Name, supposes part of those Visions to have been both seen, and written, at *Ephesus*, whither he returned, in the Reign of

Nerva. During this second Residence it was, that he wrote this Gospel, at the Request of the *Asian* Bishops.

Euseb. Hist.

Lib. iii.

Hieron. Script.

Ecclef. Cata-

log.

Iren. L. iii. c. II.

Relating therein several Passages of our Saviour's Life (particularly in the beginning of his Ministry) which the Other Evangelists had omitted; and setting himself to prove the eternal Existence of the *Word*, or Son of God, in opposition to the Heresies of *Ebion* and *Cerintbus*, and the *Nicolaitans*, who denied our Lord's Divinity. About the same time his Epistles are thought to have been written: The First whereof, with what Design hath been observed before.

Here he is said to have avoided the Bath, in which *Cerintbus* washed; lest the Judgment of God should destroy him, when found in Company with so vile a Heretic. Such Abhorrence had even the best Men at that time, such dreadful Apprehensions of Those, who presumed to deny our Saviour's Divinity; so far from allowing them any manner of Countenance, as not to think it either becoming or safe, to mingle, so much as in civil or casual Conversation, with such impious and professed Enemies to the Truth. Here *St. John* lived to a very old Age, some say to Ninety eight or nine, others to a Hundred, or a Hundred and twenty, Years. And, when decayed so far, as to be disabled from longer Exhortations, he used in the Publick Assemblies, to inculcate this short, but comprehensive, Lesson, *Little Children,*

Children, love one another. Here, *lastly*, he died a natural Death, and was buried near the City. A Martyr in Disposition; and so far in Fact, as his Imprisonment from the *Jews*, and his Boiling Cauldron, and Banishment by the *Romans*, could make him. A wonderful Pattern of Holiness and Charity, and a Writer so profound, as to deserve, by way of Eminence, the Character of St. *John the Divine*. And yet, such was his Humility, that in all his Writings he is remarkable, for never mentioning his own Name; but always speaking of himself under some ambiguous Title; and of his Character, only as *The Elder*. This Manner of His is thought to have ministred Occasion of Doubt for some time, whether the *Second* and *Third* Epistles were His, or another *John's*, commonly known by the Name of *John the Elder*. But the Church, upon mature Deliberation, have received them into the Canon; Moved by the several Marks, which were thought sufficient Discoveries, of their being dictated, by the same Spirit, with the other undoubtedly genuine Works of this Divine Author. Let Thus much suffice for the *First* Head I proposed, *viz.* To shew, from a very brief Account of this Holy Apostle and Evangelist in general, what reason the Church of Christ hath, to pay perpetual Honour to his Memory. I pass now to consider, a little more particularly, that small Portion of his Gospel, appointed to be read on this Occasion.

Now This plainly consists of Two Parts. The One, relating to St. *Peter*, in the Question he asked concerning St. *John*, and the Reproof of such unseasonable and useless Curiosity, with which I forbear at present to concern my self. Partly because I have elsewhere treated of that matter more at large; But chiefly, because it is only introductive of that Other Part, which immediately affects

Hieron. in Gal.
vi. 10.

Euseb. *Hist.*
L. iii. c. 28.
Hieron. in *Catalog.*
Euseb. L. iii.
c. 15.

Vol. Sermon.
Printed 1700.
Ser. I.

our Evangelist. And therefore, confining my Discourse to This, I shall employ the Remainder of it, upon these few following Observations.

1. *First*, The Care he takes here, to prevent any Mistakes concerning himself, which might, and did arise, from a Misconstruction of those doubtful Words concerning him, *If I will, that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* Upon this Occasion he acquaints us, there went a Saying abroad

Ver. 22.

among the Brethren, that That Disciple should not die. But, how weak and ungrounded such Saying was, the next Period informs us,

Ver. 23.

Yet Jesus said not unto him He shall not die, but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to Thee? To make this Opinion look more probable, The particular Affection of Jesus, The extreme Old Age, by which St. John long survived the rest of the Apostles, And the Want of any particular Account of the Manner of his Death, might in some measure contribute. But still all these Arguments, when closely considered, will be found to import no such Matter.

For, *First*, Whatever Value a Privilege of this Kind might bear with Men, who had but a weak Belief, and imperfect Notions, of a future and better State; Yet, to an Apostle, firm in his Assurance of another Life, satisfied that *to be absent from the Body was to be present with the Lord*, exposed to perpetual Dangers and Persecutions during his Continuance here, and detained from the Participation of that Joy, which he knew to be prepared for a Recompence of such Labours and Sufferings: To such a One, I say, the being exempted from the common Fate of his Brethren, deserves to be esteem'd not a Privilege, but a Punishment. Of which They, who maintain this to be St. John's Case, seem sufficiently sensible. For, instead of acknowledging his Death, they take Refuge in a fabulous Sleep, and a Translation, like that of *Enoch* and *Elias*; for which no authentick

authentick History furnishes, and this most authentick of all Histories cuts off, any manner of Foundation. In such Fictions as these, Men follow their own carnal Sense of things, and imagine the Pain of Dying to be some terrible Calamity, from which it was very agreeable to suppose a Disciple, so high in his Master's Favour, deliver'd; like that Patriarch, and that Prophet heretofore. But the Apostles, and Primitive Christians, had Sentiments very different from These. Those good Men, armed with the Consolations of the Holy Spirit, and the Supporting Prospects of the Joy set before them, had learnt to despise, to embrace, to rejoice, to triumph in, Tortures and Death. A future State of Happiness and Glory reserved for the Just, when taken out of this World, is a Point, for which, under a more imperfect Dispensation, the Translations of *Enoch* and *Elias* were proper Evidences. But the Translation of an Apostle could not be necessary, because all Occasion for such Proofs must have ceased, to Men, who enjoyed the clearer Revelations of the Gospel, and who had before an undeniable Attestation of this Matter, in the Example of that Jesus, whom they believe, to have been crucified, and dead, to have risen from the Dead, and to have ascended into Heaven.

Again, it is easy to discern the Effects of a wise and good Providence, in lengthening out the Age of this Apostle, and at last taking him away by a Natural Death. The Former furnished more abundant Opportunities, for the Influence of his Teaching and Example; and for ascertaining the Truth to many more eminent Persons, who succeeded in the Church, and had the Advantage of consulting, and conversing with him. This added to the Weight and Authority of the Three other Evangelists, whose Writings he is expressly said to have perused, and approved. The same may reasonably be presumed of the Acts and Epistles, all which were in being, long before his Decease. This furnished us with a more expli-

cite Account of our Lord's Divinity, and the Union of Two Natures in the Person of *Jefus Chrift* ; occasioned by the Errors of thofe bold Hereticks, who were his Contemporaries. This fupplied us with many Facts, wholly omitted ; and with more full Relations of Some, not fo diftinctly recited, by the Evangelifts that wrote before him. In a word, This derives mighty Veneration upon the Canon of Scripture ; That nothing is received there, but what an Eye and Ear-witnefs of what Jefus did and fpoke, did either write himfelf, or declare to be written faithfully, as to the Historical Part of the Gofpel. And for the Reft, that the Authors were all dead, and their Treatifes communicated freely. So that, here was no room for impofing upon the World, either in Fact, or Doctrine, or Difcipline ; while there remained ftill living, One, who could neither want the Ability, nor the Inclination, to detect the Cheat. And, if we do but reflect at all, we cannot but be fatisfied, that thefe were mighty Benefits and Strengthenings to the Chriftian Caufe. A Caufe, that fuffers ftill from the Perverfenefs of wicked Seducers, and the Unbelief of ignorant unfettled Minds. But how much more muft it in likelihood have fuffered, had not this Apoftle furvived to fee, and arm us againft, the Seeds of a Poifon not yet kill'd ; to give Light to them, who might otherwife have put on Darknefs for a Cloak ; and to affert the true Antiquity of Principles in Religion, which, fome would fain perfuade us, are only the tyrannical Impofitions of Councils, or the Cobwebs of later School-men ?

And, as the Length of this Apoftle's Life, fo the Manner of his Death alfo, had its Ufefulnefs. The going away from Men fo full of Days, and in perfect Quiet, is, or ought to be, a Warning to the Violent and the Great, the Oppreffors and Perfecutors of this World ; that there is an over-ruling Power above, which all their Malice cannot defeat : That, under the Protection of this Power Good People are, and therefore, farther than This
fees

fees fit to permit, they cannot be prevailed over: That, God will never suffer his Truth to fail, but get himself Glory of all its Enemies. And, on the other Hand, that They, who are heartily disposed to suffer for their Duty, shall not lose their Crown for not actually doing so. St. *John* was, no doubt, esteemed to *drink of Christ's Cup, and to be baptized with his Baptism*, though neither beheaded like his Brother *James*, nor crucified like his Companion *Peter*. Let but our Death be the Death of the Saints, and be the Kind what it will, it is certainly precious in the sight of God.

These seem to be very natural Inferences from the Circumstances of our Apostle, and substantial Reasons for God's dealing thus with him. But, to build upon these an Opinion, of his being an Exception to the Fate of common Mortals, can be imputed to no Cause so justly, as to the Rashness of a preposterous Zeal. And, to urge the Passage now at Hand, in Vindication of that Opinion, is not only to offer manifest Violence to the Text, but to fix upon it a Sense, which the Party concerned declares belonged not to it. 'Tis to advance a Fiction, in despite of that solemn Warning, which He, according to his usual Modesty, hath left, against any such foreign and forced Interpretations, as he takes Notice to have already obtained with some. But such were then more excusable, than now they can be, after St. *John* had thus forbidden Posterity to make them.

What remains of this Portion of Scripture, is a Declaration, that the Matters contained in the Gospel, written by St. *John*, may be depended upon for Truth. What we have to this Purpose at the *Twenty fourth Verse*, is, by some Interpreters, supposed to be spoken in the Name of the Church at *Ephesus*, expressing their entire Satisfaction in this Point; by Others, as a solemn Profession of his own Veracity, made by St. *John* himself. It is by no means agreeable to my present Design, to enter into critical Disputes: Especially, where the

Consequence of determining either way is of no greater Account, than here it seems to be. Let it suffice to say then, that in either Acceptation, these Two concluding Verses offer an Argument, for the Truth of this Gospel, consisting of Two Parts. The One referring, to the Person that wrote it; The Other, to the Measure of that which is written. Some little shall be spoken to each of these, and then I have done with the Subject of this Day.

First, Let the Person that wrote it be considered. One, who, from the beginning of our Lord's Ministry, had been his inseparable Attendant and Companion: One, who had all possible Advantages of informing himself, not only from those mighty Works, and Divine Discourses, delivered and done publicly; but from the peculiar Favours of a more retired Conversation: One, who lay under no necessity of taking up any part of his Report at second hand; and so was liable to none of those Misrepresentations, common, Either to them who study to deceive, Or to them who, without Design, have often the Misfortune to set things in a different Light, merely by varying of Circumstances and Expressions: One, who spoke, (as his *First Epistle* was observed to profess) from the Consent and agreeing Testimony of all his Senses; and that in Matters, of which the Senses are proper and competent Judges; And, for the rest, too high for these Faculties to reach, One, who was assisted and inspired by God himself, chosen and appointed a Preacher and a Witness, and proved a faithful Witness by numberless Miracles; Such Miracles, as nothing less than a Divine Power could perform, such, as were perform'd, on purpose to be Attestations to the Doctrines he taught, and therefore such, as leave no room for thinking the Doctrines they confirmed false, without the Absurdity, and blasphemous Imputation, of making God himself a Party in the Cheat: One, whose Birth and Education never qualified him, for being skilled in the Arts of Reasoning;

soning ; much less, for the cunning Craftiness of Deceiving ; least of all for an attempt so daring, an Imagination so extravagant, as that of imposing upon a whole World at once : One, who was convinced himself upon the same Evidence, which he offered to Others ; and who proved the Sincerity of his Conviction effectually, by abandoning all his worldly Interests, at an Age, when Men use to be most sanguine, and fond of them ; And this to follow a Master, who made it no Secret, that he had not where to lay his own Head : One, that could not possibly have Prospect of better Interest, in things here on Earth, than that he left, however mean it were ; but exchanged Safety, and Business, and unenvied Quiet, for Poverty and Persecutions, Obloquy and Malice, universal Opposition, and continual Toil and Danger : One, that could not have been the beloved Disciple of *the Truth, the Way, and the Life*, had he swerved from Sincerity and Truth : And *Lastly*, One, for the Weight and Sublimity of whose Writings, no Man alive is able to account, otherwise than from his leaning on that Breast, *in which were hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*. Being instructed, I mean, from above. This, and much less than this, no sober Man excepts against, for a sufficient Inducement to believe, in Other Matters. But in This, alas ! this single Affair of Religion, Men think it Prudence, to mock their Souls with fancied Difficulties, and object, and cavil themselves, out of their Salvation. And yet all this (and let as much be produced, if there can, for any other Testimony, which is relied upon most firmly) All this, I say, and more, comes in, to give Credit and Authority to *St. John*. And 'tis no over-straining of the Point, when we apply it all to that Character of his Gospel here, *This is the Disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his Testimony is true*.

2. A Second Consideration, enforcing this Argument, is the Measure of that which is written. *St. John*, as

was said before, proposed as one End of compiling this Gospel, the supplying us with several important Transactions in our Saviour's Life, omitted by the other Three Evangelists. But, lest his Enemies should suspect a Favourite Disciple, to have allowed himself too great a Liberty of enlarging upon this Occasion ; He tells us in the close, that it is not for want of Matter, his History ends so soon. So far from this, that it is not to be conceived, much less to be told, how many of our Lord's Actions are still left unrehearsed. This is the Substance of the Twenty fifth Verse, *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the World itself would not contain the Books that should be written.*

An expression, which shews that even the Holy Spirit himself does not disdain those Figures, which They, to whom he condescends to speak, find themselves obliged to use, for a more lively expression of their Thoughts, upon lofty Subjects, and extraordinary Occasions. And this Example proves those squeamish People to be as bad Casuists as they are Orators ; who charge with Falshood all those innocent Modes of Speech, which only illustrate, and adorn, without any studied Intention or natural Tendency, to deceive.

The Substance then of this Conclusion is, That there is as much delivered down to us, as need be ; though not so much, as might be. And this acquits the Author of Partiality, in a Case where there was no possibility of exceeding. It was his Design to satisfy, but not to oppress, us with Evidence. Had not the Former been done, St. John could not have said, *These things are written that ye might believe.* And when enough was written for that Purpose, why should we desire, why should we fondly obtrude that which is not written for more ? It can be no just Reflection upon Scripture, or its Perfection, that all our Lord's Miracles are not related, all his Discourses not repeated there ; since that
is

is truly perfect, which is sufficiently fitted for its End. And they, who tax the Gospel of such Insufficiency, will do well to acquaint us, what Additions to it will suffice. What can those Miracles be, which would convince, if these, which we know already, are too weak? What those Discourses, which would prevail, if such as we read here, have not the Power to persuade? Men may bear others in hand, and perhaps delude themselves, with a Pretence, that, if some Discoveries were a little clearer, some things express'd more fully and distinctly, some Grounds of Objection obviated; they would believe as assuredly, and live as strictly, as they, who press the Necessity of both most, could wish. But all these are vain Imaginations, and they know not what they ask. Were all these things just as they would have them, yet even then, they would be, where they are. The same Pride, or favourite Lust, or worldly Interest, would still produce the same Effects. And no Words can ever be so plain, but these might draw to an ambiguous Sense; no Points so clear, where Prejudice cannot start fresh Doubts. In a Word, what *Abraham* left upon the Rich Man, is, with its necessary Variation, true of all Mankind, who live under the Ministry of the Gospel: *If they believe not the Revelations they have already, neither would they believe, neither would they be contented with, any other they could have.* He that is an Infidel, would be an Infidel still; And he that is unjust and filthy, would be unjust and filthy still. *Cleanse therefore your hands, ye wicked, and purify your hearts, ye double minded; Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you;* For, if any Man be seriously disposed to do his Will, and stand not in his own Light, that Man shall not fail to *know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether Jesus Christ, and his Apostles, have spoken of themselves.*

But as for Those, who are already persuaded of the Truth, as it is in *Jesus*; let Them thankfully receive
that

that Measure of Light, which God hath afforded. Let them bless him, for the abundant Evidence he hath given; for assuring their Hearts in the Faith of his Son; esteeming it, as it really is, the Glory of our Religion, that all the Excellencies of its Divine Author are too many, too great, to bear a particular Illustration. Let them study with Diligence the most faithful Records of his most holy Life; and search for the Treasures of Wisdom in his Heavenly Discourses. Let them improve, by what they do or may know here, in Holiness of Conversation; and wait with Patience and humble Hope, for the ravishing Discovery of that hereafter, which as yet is unattainable. So shall they pay true Reverence to the Memory of those Saints, by whose Labours they have been instructed, when they at once dwell upon their Books, and live by their Examples: So, be sure to obtain the seasonable Requests, in which, with a Charity large as His, whom we commemorate this Day, they beseech God

Collect. of his Mercy, so to enlighten his Church with the Doctrine of this blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John, that every Member of it may so walk in the Light of his Truth, as at length to attain the Light of everlasting Life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Innocents Day.

THE COLLECT.

* Psal. viii. 2.

† Matth. ii. 16.

‡ Rev. xiv. 4, 5.

O Almighty God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast * ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee † by their Deaths: Mortify and kill all Vices in us, that by the ‡ innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith, even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For

For the EPISTLE.

Rev. xiv. 1.

PARAPHRASE.

1. **I** Looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

1. Another Representation I had of Christ (the Lamb of God) standing in his Church, and all his faithful Servants, who stuck

to the Profession and Practice of the Truth, with him.

2. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder, and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.

2. At the same time I heard a mixed Noise, exceeding loud, and yet melodious too; denoting the Multitude of these faithful

Christians, the Praises, and Acclamations, and the Joy, that are among them in Heaven.

3. And they sung as it were a new song before the Throne, and before the four beasts and the Elders, and no man could learn that song, but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

3. Such is the glorious State of the Church triumphant, where God sits in Majesty, surrounded with the Spirits of Apostles, and other Holy Rulers of his

Church; where the Martyrs and Saints sing their Thanks to God, for his Grace and good Providence in their Sufferings for Christ. Thanks, which none are capable of bearing a part in, but the stedfast pure Believers.

4. These are they which were not defiled with women, for they are Virgins: These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth: These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God, and unto the Lamb.

4. And these are such as preserved themselves from the Pollutions of Idolatry and Uncleanness: Kept close to Christ, and declined no Danger he led them to:

were rescued from the Corruptions of the Age they lived in, sanctified and presented as an Offering, the Choice, the Early Product of the Field, (like the First Fruits heretofore) to God and Christ.

5. And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the Throne of God.

5. A Sacrifice, acceptable to God for their Constancy and Sincerity, like those

under the Law, in which no Blemish was found.

COMMENT.

ST. John, in the Chapter next before, describes a Vision, representing a very severe Persecution of the Christian Church; such as endeavoured, by all manner of Hardships, to draw Men over to Idolatry, and deprive those of Life

Chap. xiii.
15, 16, 17.

and

and Civil Liberties, who refused to submit to the wicked Decrees, imposed on them to this Purpose. And here he proceeds to set before us the Constancy and happy Condition of those who continued stedfast in their Principles, notwithstanding all such Discouragements to the contrary. Without entring therefore into any particular Enquiry, what distinct Events this Portion of Scripture was more especially calculated for; it shall be my Care rather to improve it, by considering, in general, the Case of those, who live and die in the undaunted Confession of the Truth. And that shall be done under Two Heads. The *One* consisting of the Virtues and Qualifications, that these Saints and Martyrs are said to be conspicuous for: The other, of the Circumstances of that blisful State, into which they are received, as a Reward for those Virtues.

I. I begin with the Virtues and Qualifications, for which these Saints and Martyrs are said to be conspicuous: according to that View of them, presented to us in the *Fourth* and *Fifth* Verses.

1. The First of these is, That *they were not defiled with Women, for they are Virgins*. From whence, what Advantage soever the Patrons and Advocates of a Single Life, voluntary, and vowed upon a Religious Account, may fancy to themselves; 'tis manifest, they over-strain the Point, when casting Reflections upon that State of Life, which the Scriptures have expressly pronounced *Honourable*; and, when they suppose all those Approaches, to pollute any Sort or Order of Men, which the Apostle hath abundantly vindicated, by stiling them the *Bed undefiled*. From hence alone it would follow evidently enough, that by the Persons *not defiled with Women*, must be meant here (if those Words were to be literally understood) Men, who never allowed themselves in any unlawful Liberties of this kind. Such as by mortifying their carnal Inclinations and Appetites, did,

Heb. xiii. 4.

did, as St. Paul expresses himself upon a like Occasion, *possess their Vessel in Sanctification and Honour*. And this is very capable of being done; Not only by never tasting such Pleasures at all; But also, by marrying, and such a Behaviour in that State, as thus also *to keep themselves pure, and undefiled Members of Christ's Body*.

This, I say, must, in all Reason, be the Signification of the Place, if taken literally. But very judicious Interpreters have rather inclined to a Figurative Importance of the Words. Nothing is more usual in the Old Testament, than to reproach the revolt of God's People to Idolatry, in the Terms of *committing Adultery and Fornication against him, going a whoring after false Gods*, and the like. Nor is this Stile peculiar to the Old, but St. Paul, in the New Testament, expressing his Fear, and great Concern, lest the *Corinthians* should have been seduced by false Teachers; does it by an Allusion, exactly the same. *I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one Husband, that*

Exod. xxxiv.

15.

Judg. ii. 17.

viii. 33.

Psal. cvi. 39.

Jerem. iii. 9.

Ezek. xvi. 29,

to 37.

I may present you as a chaste Virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the Serpent beguiled Eve through his Subtlety, so your Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Christ. Accordingly we find the Church called the *Spouse*, and our Lord the *Bridegroom*, and the Spiritual Unity between these Two, represented by Marriage. All which Metaphors do plainly proceed, upon the unalienable Right he hath, to our Worship and our Affection; and tend to prove, that the estranging the One or the Other from him, is an Act of the highest and most irreparable Injustice, a Violation of the most solemn, most sacred, Tie in the World.

Rev. xix. 7.

Matth. ix. 15.

John iii. 29.

Ephes. v. 31.

In Agreement with this Manner of speaking, so reasonable in it self, so familiar to both Testaments, we may very well understand those Persons to be intended

here, who had withstood all Allurements and Solicitations to Apostacy, and, with the strictest Fidelity, adhered to their rightful Lord. The rather, because the Persecution, now referred to, came from the Hand of a Heathen Emperor. And the Instance, in which their Compliance was required, was that of doing Honour to Idols, by Sacrifice, or Incense, or some other external Mark of Adoration. The rather still, because, not only their Heathen Persecutors, but their false complying Brethren, the Hereticks of those Times, indulged themselves in the vilest Sensuality. And therefore, in Opposition to those abominable Bestialities, it might be yet more proper, to express the immoveable Perseverance of these Faithful, by Terms of the strictest Chastity, and a Freedom from all Carnal Pollutions. And thus, I take it, we have a rational Construction of those Words, applied to Uncleaness and Fornication, in a Figurative and Spiritual Sense, *These are they which were not defiled with Women, for they are Virgins.*

This Use however we not only may, but most certainly ought to make, of the Holy Spirit's choosing to speak after this manner; That it is to very little Purpose, for Men to pretend Conscience, and Zeal, and Suffering for Religion, unless, to the Soundness of their Principles, they be careful to add Purity of Conversation. When therefore People of vicious Lives expose themselves to Hardships, for the sake of Opinions never so well established, and in Points never so essential; Do they not minister just Cause of Suspicion, that this is rather the Effect of Prejudice, or Education, of Humour, or Interest, than of Conscience, and Religion? 'Tis sure, no Man ought to give up what his Conscience tells him he ought to abide by, in point of Doctrine. But is it not as sure, that he ought not to indulge any thing forbidden, in point of Practice? Nay, is not this latter Obligation so much stronger, as the Matters of Practice are clearer, and less liable to Dispute or Mistake, than most Points
of

of Doctrine? 'Tis certainly *good to be zealously affected in a good thing*, but a Zeal, that is sincere, will be so *always*, and in every good thing. And, if this be not the Case, a Man is *zealously affected, but not well*. In short, Conscience is a uniform Rule, extending to every part of our Duty; and Religion commands doing, as well as suffering. So that there is but one way of bringing true Honour to this Cause: and therefore, if we would die Martyrs, we must live Saints.

Gal. iv. 18.

2. The Second Character of these Faithful is, That *they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*. Which, though we might extend to an Imitation of Christ, in all those Graces and Virtues, of which he hath set us a Pattern; Yet, since the *following him* is a Phrase, so often joined with *taking up the Cross*: And, in regard the Persons here spoken of, are such as did in this Sense follow him: It seems most reasonable, to understand the Words, of declining no Trials, that the Providence of God thought fit to call them to. And thus they are distinguished from those forward Men, who, like the Seed in Stony Ground, put forth

Matt. xiii. 21.

apace, and promise mighty Matters by the hasty Efforts of their eager Zeal; but, when *the Heat of Tribulation ariseth, wither away*. These, like the good Ground, on the other hand, have Root and Depth of Earth. They have considered and prepared their Minds; They suffer upon a Principle; and this enables them to bring forth Fruit with Patience. And the Reason, why such alone is good Ground, is, because, as God hath a Right to the whole of us, so he declares he will not endure any Rival, any Reserve. And therefore, how difficult soever it may seem, or, upon making the Experiment, may prove; Yet it is certainly a just and equitable Condition, which our Saviour hath propounded, that *whosoever does not* (in Comparison of Him) *bate his Father, and Mother, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Sisters, yea and his own Life*

Luke xiv. 26,
27.

also, he cannot be his Disciple: And whosoever doth not bear his Cross, and come after him, cannot be his Disciple. The Reason is, because from the Instant of devoting our selves to His Service, we cease to be at our own disposal any longer. Not that this Act of ours conveys a new Right; but it acknowledges, and makes that our Choice, which, by Creation and Redemption, was doubly vested in him before. And to say after this, So far we will go in our Obedience, and no farther; To quit our Post, when even in the hottest of the Battle; To be anxious for our Possessions, or our Dependencies, or even our Persons, when called into the Field; All this, St. Paul tells his Son *Timothy*, is absurd, and quite beside our Character. *Thou therefore* (says he) *endure*

2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

Hardness as a good Soldier of Jesus Christ. No Man that warreth entangleth himself with the Affairs of this Life, that he may please Him, who hath chosen him to be a Soldier.

But, besides the great deal, that might be urged, from the Propriety and absolute Dominion of God; The much more, from the Wisdom of the Thing, with respect to the Recompence we shall be sure to receive; This methinks should admit of no Debate, whether we ought not *to follow*, where *the Lamb* leads. Which is in Effect to doubt, Whether any Instance of our Love ought to be thought too much, for Him, who hath given such costly Proofs of his Love to Us: Whether we shall be content to suffer upon command, for our own infinite Advantage, and to prevent much worse Sufferings, in Case of Disobedience: When He, who left us the Example, did it voluntarily, for the unspeakable Benefit of Us, not to acquire any Addition of Happiness, not to prevent any Inconvenience, to Himself. In short, whether We shall be content to endure, unspeakably less than He; to do what, if we depend upon Him, He will render us able to do; in order to being afterwards as happy with Him, as it is possible for Men to be; who yet, without Him,

Him, never can be, never could have been, happy at all.

I have offered but a very little part of what this Consideration might suggest. But This, I hope, is enough to make all, who judge impartially, sensible, that they who follow the Lamb, to Prison, to Death, whithersoever he goeth, act, as becomes Men of Reason and Religion. Let me add only upon this Particular, that, when Men are thus convinced, and called upon, and obey that Call heartily; it is necessary they remember, that a *Lamb* is the Leader they profess to follow. One called so; Not only because a most precious Sacrifice, a true Passover; But because, as a Lamb before his Shearers is dumb, so he was led to the Slaughter, and opened not his Mouth. Courage indeed in suffering for a good Cause is well; But if Courage be not tempered with Meekness; if our Resentments burn in our Breasts, and boil over, in undutiful Behaviour, Projects of Mischief and Revenge, opprobrious Language, or any sort of indecent Bitterness, the Gracefulness at least of all such Suffering is lost; And neither We, nor our Cause, are like to get by it. Therefore, among other Methods proposed by St. Peter, for establishing the Credit of Christianity among its Adversaries, he seems to be principally concerned for the Manner of their Suffering. He propounds Christ as a Pattern in this respect especially, *of doing well, and even when they suffered for that, taking it patiently; For hereunto, says he, were ye called, for Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an Example, that ye should follow his steps, who did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth: Who when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered he threatned not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously, &c.*

1 Pet. ii. 20, 21,
22, 23.

By comparing which Exhortation with St. John's Account of the Martyrs in this Chapter, it is easy to discern, that this Dove-like Simplicity and Innocence, this gentle and resigned Submission to the Divine Will, this

modest, even when stoutest, Resistance unto Blood, is necessary, to render them the Persons, described at the Fifth Verse, in whose *Mouth was found no Guile, for they are without fault before the Throne of God.* The Latter of these Expressions, I make no doubt, alludes to that Law among the *Jews*, which ordered a strict Search into all the Creatures brought for Sacrifice; and forbad the Offering, in which there was any Defect, or Superfluity, or notable Blemish. Hence 'tis, we find our Blessed Lord termed the *Lamb without Spot*; And here the Saints are said to be without Fault, because no *Guile was found in their Mouth*, that is, by Reason of their undefigning Sincerity, and the uncorrupted Probity of their Minds. Now, as this Character imports their Truth and Honesty in general, so may it possibly have peculiar

Cypr. ad Antonianum & de Lapf.
Albasp. Obser.
21. L. 1.

Reference to a fraudulent Method, too often, and too scandalously, used in times of Persecution. For, in order to avoid Torture and publick Shame, Some did, by private Notes to the Magistrate, falsely signify, that they had sacrificed to Idols: And Others, who durst not go thus far, yet brought Certificates underhand of their having done so. And so, for the saving a Loss or personal Danger, were content to bear the Infamy, and give the Scandal, of a Crime they never committed. Such Tickets a Learned Man hath thought no improbable Sense of *having the Mark or Name of the Beast*; And the not submitting to any mean Subterfuges, but daring to appear what Men are, and ought to be, is certainly one Instance of a Heart without Guile, necessary in the Day of Trial.

3. There remains yet One Character of these Martyrs to be considered, in those Words, *These were redeemed from among Men, being the First Fruits unto God, and to the Lamb.* By being *redeemed from among Men*, we are to understand, that they were delivered from the common Corruptions of the World; supported under Temptations, by which others were subdued; and kept,

kept, by the Grace and Power of God unto Salvation. All which are Privileges, owing to the Merits and Efficacy of Christ's Blood, delivering from the Bondage of Sin, and ransoming those, who had otherwise continued Captives and Slaves to the Tyrannical Enemy of Souls, into *the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God*. So that the Proofs they gave, of their fervent Love, and unshaken Obedience, are not an Act entirely their own, but must be ascribed to an unseen and supernatural Assistance: To the Spirit of God, strengthening their Weakness, confirming their Resolution, and producing that Perseverance, which Flesh and Blood, alone and left to it self, is not now in a Condition of attaining.

And these again are called the *First Fruits* to God, in Allusion to the Custom of offering the First and the Best of the Crop, as an Acknowledgment due to the Giver of all good Gifts; and an Expedient, instituted to sanctify the rest of the Field. In the former Sense, as the *First*, we are to look upon these Persons, as our Leaders, placed in the forefront of the Battle, such as have borne the hottest of the Engagement, and were exposed to the Fury of the Enemy; The Martyrs, by this Post of Honour, have not only gained Promotion to themselves; but have, by their Examples, done Service to all that come after them. For, how ought we to be quickened and provoked by the Constancy of their Sufferings? And how scandalous is our Cowardice, if We shall faint and give ground, after They have so bravely broken the Force of the Enemy that comes against us?

As the First Fruits again import the *Best* of the Field, so are we to regard them, as Persons particularly favoured by God and the Lamb. For, though the Death of all his Saints be precious, even of those who live and die in Peace; Yet we cannot but see good Reason, why some Preference should be given to that Death, which is voluntary and chosen, violent, and attended with infinite

Torture and Pain; above that, which is natural and necessary, and hath no Agonies, but such as the parting of Soul and Body renders common to all Mankind. There is a manifest Difference between dying *in* the Faith, and dying *for* it; between not falling from our Integrity at our last Hour, and being content to anticipate that Hour by sacrificing a Life, at our Choice to preserve, in defence, and for the sake, of Truth and a good Conscience. All the *Righteous*, we are assured, *shall shine in the Kingdom of their Father*, but not all with equal Lustre. For that Justice, which rewards Men according to their Works, is not more concerned to crown every one *that strives lawfully*, than it is, to see, that those, who undergo sharper Conflicts, and have borne a heavier Cross, be as much distinguished in the Measures of their Recompence, and adorned with a proportionably more massive and brighter Crown.

II. And this leads me to say somewhat of my Other General Head; The Circumstances of that blissful State in which these Martyrs are described here, as a Reward for their Virtues and past Sufferings.

The first of these is, being with *the Lamb upon Mount Sion*, that is, the *Heavenly Jerusalem*; Of which That on Earth, where the Temple of God stood, and the Marks of his especial Presence were exhibited, is, in sundry Places of this and other Books in the New Testament, said to have been a Figure. And yet, though but a Figure, what glorious things do we find spoken of it in Scripture? What devout Raptures of Joy in the holy Psalmist, when at liberty to approach it? What tender Complaints, what moving Lamentations, when debarr'd of this most valuable Privilege? But, if the Shadow could deserve such Honour, how ought We to be affected with the Substance? If the sensible and Symbolical Representations only were so magnificent, what must

Ver. 1.

Gal. iv. 26.

Hebr. xii. 22.

Rev. iii. 12.

xxi. 2, 10.

must the Lustre of that Presence be, when this Veil of Flesh and Sense shall be done away, and we admitted to see God as he is? To be with Him whom our Souls love, with Him who loved our Souls so dearly, as to be born, to be afflicted, to bleed, to die for them; To be with Him for ever, to enjoy him in a League of inviolable, everlasting Friendship, in the Mansions he is gone before to prepare for us? To partake in his Glories, as we have taken part in his Sufferings; and to feel our own Glories advanced then, in Proportion as our Sufferings are multiplied here? No Dangers, no Fatigues, are esteemed insupportable by the Men of this World, for the raising a Fortune, for gaining the Renown or Valour, and faithful Service to a Prince, who is thought to pay them well, with a gracious Look sometimes, with a Title of Honour, and a small Revenue to their Family. But What, alas! are these, in comparison of the constant Favour and Presence, the intimate and unalterable Affection, of the King of Kings, the being distinguish'd in the Court of Heaven, let into a share of all our Master's Glory, nay, let into a share even of his Royalties themselves? This is what the highest Favourite, the worthiest Patriot, must not have the Vanity to hope for, from the most gracious Monarch upon Earth. And yet this is the Condescension of our heavenly Lord, this the Honour and Partnership, to which Saints and Martyrs have a Title. For, These he is said to make *Kings* and *Priests*, and to all such is promised for their Encouragement, that *if they die with him, they shall also live with him, if they suffer with him, they shall also reign with him.* Nor is the Pleasure flowing from these Promotions, like that from these here below, the less for being thus communicated. Quite otherwise; I take a

Rev. i. 6.

v. 10.

2 Tim. ii. 12.

2. *Second* Circumstance of the Bliss described in this Chapter to result from the Numbers, to whom it is imparted. Great part of the Satisfaction, taken in the

Blessings of this World, depends upon Comparifon. Few would efteem themfelves happy in the Enjoyment, did not this make a difference between their own, and the Cafe of others that want them. Nor is this altogether, though too much, from Narrownefs of Spirit; but, in great Meafure, from the Streightnefs and Infufficiency of the things themfelves. But now, the Blessings of our Future State being Boundlefs, and fuch as can never be exhausted; As thefe Qualities leave no room for Envy and Emulation, fo neither will glorified Souls retain any Difpofition to them. Every other's Happinefs will then be an Addition to each Man's Personal Happinefs. But more efpecially will they all be affected with the Honour of our God and Saviour, and the Conquefts and Successes his Blood hath obtained; Which, the more the Redeemed and Glorified are, the greater and more wonderful they are. And therefore it had taken from this Blifs, and represented it much lefs, to have faid, that One, or a Few, than that a *Hundred and forty four thousand* of thefe Saints, were all together with *the Lamb on Mount Sion*. And the Apoftle to the *Hebrews* hath therefore added, that we fhall then *come to an innumerable Company of Angels, To the general Affembly and Church of the firft born, which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the Spirits of juft Men made perfect, and to Jefus the Mediator of the new Covenant.*

Hebr. xiii. 22,
23, 24.

Imagine with your felves Two Friends, dear as their own Souls to each other; Thefe, both engaged in Enterprifes of the utmoft Difficulty, in diftant Parts of the World; Each exercifed with Dangers and Hardfhips, for the Service of his Country; And, with a vaft Expence of Blood and Toil, fucceeding fo well, that no Marks of Honour are thought too much for them. Imagine thefe Two Friends, after long Abfence, thus laden with Conqueft, and adorned with Laurels, meeting and finding each other, juft as they could wifh. What joyful Wel-

comes,

comes, what mutual Rejoicings, what reciprocal Fruition of their past Labours, and present Triumphs, must such an Interview create? And, when you have carried this Image as high as you can go, and multiplied it to Tenthousand times as much, by supposing Tenthousand such Cases; Know that such, and much more than this, are the mutual Gratulations of the Blessed in Heaven. As much more, as their Sufferings have been sharper; As much more, as the Cause, in which they suffered is nobler; As much more, as the Enemies they have vanquished are stronger; As much more, as the Reward for their Service is more bountiful, more lasting, more unenvy'd; In a Word, As much more, as these mystical Members of Christ's Body are united with a more entire and disinterested Affection, and consequently more transported with the gallant Actions, and Successes, and Glories of each other, than it is possible for the sincerest and most generous Friends on Earth to be. And this Love, this Unanimity it is, that qualifies them to join in that, which I would observe from the *Third Verse*, as another Circumstance of their Felicity:

3. The singing together Conforts of Praise to God and the Lamb. For, that such is the Subject of their Song, we may learn from several like Passages of this Book. And this must needs be an Eternal Subject. For, if even We, who see things very darkly, might yet, with very little Application, find Matter more than enough, to employ the whole of our Lives in Holy Thanks and Wonder: How plentifully must they be furnished, who are placed in a nearer and more distinct View, of the essential Excellencies, and marvellous Works of God? How delightful must Their Contemplation be of the Majesty and Power, the Wisdom and the Goodness, the Holiness and the Justice of God? How pleasing the Reflections of these, which are cast upon their Minds; From the Glass of the Creation, the nicest and most

*Chap. v. 9, 10,
12, 13.
vii. 10, &c.
xix. 1, 7.*

beauteous parts whereof are at present hid from our Sight ; From the Dispositions of Providence, and those secret Over-rulings of Events, which make *all things work together for good to them that love God* ; From the Myſteries of our Redemption, and, *that love of Chriſt which paſſeth Knowledge* ; and, not to mention more, From their own paſt Labours and Sufferings, and that Condeſcenſion, which counted them worthy to *endure Reproach for the ſake of Chriſt* ; permitted their Blood to be ſhed in ſo Glorious a Cauſe ; and made them ſo ample a Compensation, for every Drop they ſpilt, for every Tear they ſhed, for every Torture they felt, for every dying Agony they ſo magnanimouſly ſuſtained. Who can ſee, and feel, and meditate on, theſe Things in Silence ? Who can ſpeak of them in any Language, but that of Praise ? And who, that hath begun to praise, can ever deſiſt again ? But withal, ſince this Song of Praise, it is expreſſly ſaid, could not be learnt by any but ſuch Saints ; Who would think any Coſt too much, to purchaſe

a part in ſuch Felicity ? Who, *count even his Life dear to him, ſo that he might finiſh his Courſe with ſuch Joy* as this ? And therefore it is, that theſe Joys are revealed, that they may excite in us a becoming Zeal, and fervent Deſire ; The ſame, that Men of like Paſſions, and like good Senſe at leaſt, with our ſelves, have been fired with, and found their Account in : The ſame, that will add to our Reproach and Condemnation, if we reſolve to periſh ſlothfully and ingloriouſly, and will neither be attracted to Virtue by ſuch Proſpects, nor ſhamed into Courage by ſuch Examples.

Theſe are ſome of the many Conſiderations, Offering themſelves, from the Account now before us, concerning the Martyrs in general. Which the Church hath propounded to our Meditations this Day, as containing ſome things, not improperly applicable to thoſe Infants in particular, whoſe barbarous Murther by *Herod* was made

Instrumental to the Glory of Him for whom they died. For They, in the most literal Sense, *were not defiled* with sensual Pleasures, who left the World in *Virgin* Innocence. They were most truly *redeemed from among Men*, whose early Translation to a State of Bliss and Security, prevented the Hazards and Temptations of a corrupt Age. They were, strictly speaking, *the First Fruits unto God and the Lamb*, who began to shed their Blood, in the cause of a new-born Saviour, and were the first Fruits of the Martyrs themselves. By this earliest experiment of Cruelty against his blessed Son, it pleased God to demonstrate, how vain all future attempts of his Enemies should be, whose implacable and bloody Malice laboured to destroy this hated King of the Jews, either in his Person or his Members: And, that such wicked Designs should have no other Issue, than those of this Day. Disappointment and Vengeance to the inhuman Contrivers, Happiness and Reward to the Innocent Sufferers, and Increase of Honour to the Person, in whose cause they suffered. Thus *Herod* shortly after lived and died, a remarkable monument of the Divine Justice, and perished by a Complication of Plagues, as amazing as the unparalleled Crimes, that drew them down upon him. Thus these tender Plants, cut off in the bud, sprung up again and flourished; And bore such fruits, as their Circumstances were capable of; The confession of their Blood, though not of their Tongues: By which They and their memory are blessed. And Thus the blessed Jesus, after sojourning in a strange Country, returned to enlighten his own, with that Doctrine, which, from the very first setting out of its Author into the World, was manured with Blood, grew under persecutions, and by the fate attending it, proved, that to die in its defence, was not to lose a life, but to save it. This is in truth the quickest, and the surest passage, from Death unto Life. From a Life, in the midst of which we are in Death; To a Life, which is so indeed; Life Im-

mortal

mortal and full of Glory. To which God of his infinite mercy bring us, for the sake of his Dear Son, and our only Redeemer, Christ Jesus. *Amen.*

The G O S P E L.

St. Matth. ii. 13.

PARAPHRASE.

13. Almighty God, foreseeing the wicked Design of Herod against Christ, and the cruel Effects of his Disappointment of Intelligence from the Wifemen, gave Joseph timely Warning of it, by the Message of an Angel, and directed him what Course to take, for preserving the Child and his Mother.

13. **T**HE Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a Dream, saying, Arise and take the young child, and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14. This Message Joseph readily complied with, and taking the Advantage of the Night to conceal his Motions,

14. And he arose, and took the young child, and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15. And dwelt in Egypt, till Herod died, and he received fresh Orders, as the Angel had promised he should, for returning back again. By this Method the Divine Providence accomplished a Prophecy of Hosea, which (had not only a retrospect upon what had pass'd upon Israel, but) look'd forward also upon Him, of whom Israel, when spoken of as the Servant or Child of God, is more than once set as a Type, even the Messiah.

15. And was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.

16. Mean while Herod, impatient of the Affront and Disappointment, sustained by the Wifemen not informing him where this Child was to be found, resolved to take a Course for destroying him, which he thought could not miss. And that was, to murder all the Children in and about the Place, where it was agreed Christ must have been born; and of or about that Age, which (by Computation of the Time when his Star denoted that Birth) Christ must have been of.

16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wifemen, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the Children that were in Betlehem, and in all the Coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wifemen.

17, 18. The general Grief upon which Occasion was a most eminent Completion of that Prophecy in Jeremiab, which represents Rachel the Mother of Joseph and Benjamin,

17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the Prophet, saying,

(and consequently a proper Mourner for the Captivity of the Ten Tribes signified by Ephraim, and for this Calamity too, since Benjamin and Judab's Posterity, the Two other Tribes, were promiscuously concerned, and dwelt

18. In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

dwelt by one another) inconfolably bewailing the Loss and Death of her Children. And, for such Sorrow of afflicted Mothers there could never be a more melancholy Cause, than the Barbarity of *Herod* gave, by this general and bloody Slaughter,

C O M M E N T.

THE Historical Account of this Passage is so plain, that almost the Only, as well as the most profitable, thing I have to do, will be to improve it, by some Moral Reflections. To which purpose I shall observe, What were the wicked Incentives to this barbarous Injustice, How these came to prevail, The Circumstances of Them who suffered, And the Unsuccessfulness of this bloody Act, to the End, hoped and intended to have been accomplished by it.

First then, We have in *Herod* a very lively Instance of Envy and Ambition. The ground of his uneasiness was the News of one born *King of the Jews*, which seem'd to threaten Danger to his own, and his Family's, Pretensions to the Government. And it may be worth our while to take notice, by what vile and indirect Methods, he laboured to prevent the supposed ill Consequences of this memorable Event.

Herod, no doubt, was full of that mistaken Notion of the Messiah's Coming (then daily expected) that it should be in outward Pomp and Splendour, and the Excellency of a Kingdom, consisting in Victories, and Triumphs, and worldly Dominion. And therefore, to cut this short at once, he descends to the basest Hypocrisy, and professes a desire of doing homage to this glorious young Prince. But, finding that project of dissembled Respect defeated, he enters upon Another, of Sacrificing to his Jealousy a great number of young Children. And, if Some, who have treated of this matter, say true, he had the unnatural Barbarity, to take off a Son of his own among the rest.

Now, What a warning should such an Example as this be, to every Man that sees or hears of it, to keep a strait Hand

Hand over those desires of Honour and Greatness, which are so natural to Mankind ; so very pleasing when gratified ; but withal, so full of Jealousy and Torment, so very apt to break thro' all Obligations of Nature and Duty, when indulged beyond due measure ? And indulged beyond due measure they certainly are, when not restrained by this principle, of not allowing our selves in any thing unlawful, unsincere, or unbecoming, for the giving them Satisfaction. How wretched a Contradiction are those People to themselves, who, in their too warm and eager Pursuits after Honour, stick at no means, though never so dishonourable ? This is to prostitute the very thing they profess to court. How heinous an Injury is it to an Inclination, which seems to have been interwoven with our Original Constitution, on purpose for a Spur, to useful, noble, and uncommon Undertakings, when, instead of being excited by it to Actions laudable and good, Men debase it to the most mischievous Designs ; compass their Ends by Perfidiousness, Injustice, Inhumanity ; Overturn all Laws, and erase the best and brightest Impressions of Reason and Religion upon their Minds ? It is as lamentable, as it is amazing, to consider, to what exorbitant Villanies Men of unbounded Ambition have, without the least appearance of Remorse, been abandoned, that they might, either arrive at Greatness, or establish themselves in it. What Liberties and Rights, What Lives, What Nations and States have fallen a Prey to this aspiring Evil. But so it ever was, when Power became the Measure and Rule, as well as the End, of great Actions and Designs ; Nothing hath then been boggled at, nothing omitted, which this hath found it self able to compass.

And yet, as many Tragical Instances as History furnishes of this kind, as just a Detestation as every considerate Reader conceives against them ; 'Tis but too sad a Truth, that the same Cause produces the same Effects every Day still. It does so, even among those who call them-

themselves Christians. Professors of a Religion, whose fundamental Principles, and peculiar Temper, are Humility, and Meekness, and Contempt of the World. A Religion, which labours above all things, to persuade us, that not Crowns and Scepters, not universal Empire, not the whole World, and all the Glories of it, are worth the doing any one thing, to attain or to secure them, which may wound our Consciences, or injure any Man breathing: And, that the true way to be exalted indeed, is to abase and to deny our selves, to mortify our Vanity, and to seek that Honour, which cometh from God only.

Methinks it might be one considerable help toward doing so, to reflect very seriously upon the horror of such Examples, as This now before us. By the deserved *Oidium*, and great Enormity of Wretches, so transported by the force of this furious Passion, we might arm our selves in time, and oppose, against the violence of so strong a Torrent, the engagements of Justice and Charity, Moderation, and Humanity, and a steady Virtue. For, though all these are little enough, when the eagerness of Ambition is pushing us forward; Yet they will be of great use, to cool and keep down such heat; if we look before-hand, what Precipices this Passion will certainly run us upon, when it grows headstrong, and gets the Rein in its Teeth. And, however our Judgment may be blinded then; Yet to Them, who see the Evil and Danger of this Action here, even *Herod's* Crown cannot but seem a Purchase much too dear, at the expence of so much innocent Blood, and the never to be forgotten Guilt, and the Infamy, of shedding it.

II. *Secondly*, The Instance now in hand may be of excellent use, to prevent, or correct, the wild excesses of Immoderate Anger. The Text tells us that *Herod was exceeding wroth*, and the pretended ground for this Resentment was, that he thought himself *mocked by the Wisemen*. But, supposing Them guilty of neglect, in not returning with an account,

Ver. 16.

account where this young King was to be found ; yet what Provocation had these poor Infants given, that such a Slight should be so severely revenged upon Them ; How had so many tender Mothers deserved to be made Childless ? How the Coasts of *Bethlehem*, to be drowned in Blood and Tears, only because God had given that place the honour, of bringing into the World the Joy and Desire of all Nations, and then had defeated the treachery and malice of a Tyrant, wicked enough to endeavour the disappointing all Nations, of that Desire and Joy ? But alas ! when we argue thus, it is to be supposed we address to Men in a Condition to be treated with ; and not to those who have lost all consideration, and are past the Power of Persuasion. For such in truth, are all Men transported with Passion, and inflamed with Resentment. Rage then hath got the upper hand of Reason ; All Regard to Equity is lost. The Nature of the Crime ; the degree of the Punishment due for it ; Or indeed, Whether any be due ; Or if there be, Who are the Persons on whom it ought to fall ; are Deliberations entirely set aside. This wild Beast, once let loose, falls upon every thing that comes in its way, devours without distinction, and, in its thirst for blood, knows no measure. And therefore, among the many other forcible Arguments, for governing our Passion, This ought by no means to be neglected ; That Men in their Fury banish all Pity, all Humanity ; That neither Justice, nor Innocence, nor Sex, nor Age, can stand before it. And surely nothing ought more to weigh with us, for being upon our guard against all that is apt to ruffle us than the almost irresistible Temptation, which Men, who have lost their temper, lye under, to act in their heats such unjust, such brutish things, as all in their right Minds scorn and detest them for. Such, as themselves, when looking back upon them in cold Blood, feel they are never able, either to repair the wrong of by any after-compensation, or to wash

wash away the guilt and shame of, but by the Tears of a most afflicting Remorse.

III. Hence we may take occasion, in the *Third* place, to observe the miserable Condition of those hardened Wretches, whom Almighty God suffers to fall from one degree of Wickedness to another, till at last they become ripe for Destruction, and visible Monuments of the Divine Vengeance. And such was *Herod* here. For the true understanding of whose Case, and the righteousness of God's Dispensation toward him, it may not be amiss, to view the several Circumstances mentioned in this Chapter, and to shew from thence, wherein his Guilt, and the hardning of his Heart, consisted.

Now *Herod* is here represented, as a Person in great Power, *King of Judæa*. The coming of the Wisemen from another Country, The Resolution of the Chief Priests assembled at *Jerusalem*, concerning the place determined for the *Messiah's* Birth; The general expectation of it about that time; the Wisemen inferring it already pass'd, and signified by the Star, which had conducted them thither; These were all Passages very awakening to him. Those Wisemen disobeying his Command, of bringing back notice where that Child was to be found, wrought, we see, very strongly upon his mind. And the Consequence makes it manifest, what designs he cherished from the very first; and that his dissembled Inclination to worship this wonderful Infant, was only a Contrivance, thereby to gain an Opportunity of destroying him.

But now, Had all these things been considered, Interest, and Passion, and Prejudice apart; Was it not very natural to suppose, that the appearance of an extraordinary Star, the Zeal of those Travellers, the concurrent Testimony of the Jewish Doctors, should have suggested, that Providence had a more than common Concern in all this Matter? Ought it not in reason to have

have been presumed, that the Wisemen, who disappointed his Expectations, and yet lay under no visible temptation to disobey him, had met with some such over-ruling direction, which diverted them another way in their return home, as they had found before, in their Journey thither? And, was it not a very obvious Conclusion from all this, that God had discovered his Hypocrisy, and set himself against his wicked Intentions? That therefore it were fitter for him to repent of the past, than to engage in any new attempts, so impossible to be concealed, so unlikely to prosper? These Inferences, I say, might much more reasonably have been deduced, from what had passed in the whole course of this Affair, than any of those, to which *Herod* converted it. So that, upon the whole, Providence did not, by these Events, fix, or unavoidably ordain, the Effects of them, but left them free to be applied to Good or Ill Purposes. Nay, they were rather applicable to Good than Evil; But still capable of Either, According to the Will and Disposition of the Party, concerned to make his use of them.

Now it is farther to be considered, that, although our corrupt Nature have a most unhappy tendency to Evil; Yet, to those who will incline to it, there is always at hand a Principle above Nature, correcting that propensity, and drawing them to Good. And this I conceive, to be imparted not only to very Good Men, but, in some convenient measure, to all that are not very Bad Men. The force of this, like that other Principle it works against, is strengthened by Compliance and Custom. And, as the Corruption of our Nature will not hurt us, except we indulge and inflame it; So neither will the Influence of Grace forsake us, except we resist and quench it. Herein, 'tis true, is a mighty difference; That our Corruption is born with us, but Grace is given us freely; And therefore Grace must be liable to such Conditions, for its Continuance and Increase, as the infinitely

finitely Wise and Good Giver thinks fit to suspend it upon. But, since the Benefit of the Receiver is what he chiefly aims at; we may depend upon it, that the same Kindness, which prevailed for the giving, will equally prevail for continuing the Gift, so long as it is thankfully received, and duly improved. On the other hand, if this Bounty be repaid with Ingratitude and Contempt; we are not to wonder, that the Giver does not so far contribute to His own Dishonour, as the not withdrawing the slighted Instances of His Love, and seeming to contend in vain with insolent and insensible Wretches, must needs do.

Now we must not suppose God moved, by such partial and unaccountable Tenderneſs, in diſtinguiſhing Men by His Favour, as We our ſelves are. He always gives, and takes away, with reaſon. Thoſe whom He once loves, He loves unto the end, provided they be careful to continue in His Love. He muſt do ſo, becauſe, ſuppoſing no ſuch provocation, as ſhould alter His Affection, the ſame ground of loving them ſtill remains. And He, as I ſaid, proceeds, not upon Paſſion and Humour, which have their Ebbings and Flowings; but upon Equity and Reaſon, which are a Meaſure certain, and ſteady, and laſting. And thus much, I think, may ſerve to convince us, that They who loſe the Grace of God, finally, loſe it by their own fault.

But ſtill it would be known what it is to loſe the Grace of God, with regard to the Caſe before us. And in order hereunto, let us obſerve, that the Grace, I am now ſpeaking of, is a ſecret Operation of the Spirit of God upon the Hearts of Men; Which, by a wonderful, but gentle and ſecret, concurrence with their own Wills and Faculties, gives a new turn to their thoughts; Diſpoſes them to attend to, and ſee the Reaſonableneſs of their Duty: Represents the Arguments for doing well in their true light; and gives thoſe Arguments ſuch a happy and powerful Influence upon the Affections, as

X

brings

brings these into Obedience to the Governing part of the mind. And all this is directly opposite to that Depravity of Nature, which tempts Men to be heady and unper-suadable, to overlook and lessen the Motives to Virtue, and lean eternally to the side of Sense and rebellious Appetite.

When therefore we are told of *Mens hardning their hearts in Sin*; The meaning is, that they have so frequently, and so long, given way to their vicious Inclinations, and turned the deaf Ear to the better Motions of God's Spirit, that its Checks and Admonitions do no longer make any Impression upon their Minds. And when we are told, that *God hardens mens hearts*; This is not so to be understood, as if He did infuse any new and positive Disposition to do wickedly: But only, that he withdraws those Assistances, which They, by obstinate and customary Sinning, have rendred ineffectual to their Reformation: And so leaves off thus to check or admonish them at all. Then their own vicious Inclinations, and the Temptations of the Devil, are in their full force. And this ceasing to oppose the Powers of his Grace against These, seems to be all that the Scripture intends, by hardening Them, who had first hardened themselves.

Now what Injustice, what Hardship can we charge such a Proceeding with; Which, upon the matter, amounts to no more, than, after many trials, and tenders of Kindness, leaving off to persuade, and urge, and strive with, Wretches who will not suffer themselves to be persuaded, and overcome, to their own Advantage? This is not tempting, nor compelling Men to sin, but giving them over to their own perverse Choice; 'Tis only a Permission of that Evil, which, in such Circumstances, does not appear possible to be prevented, without breaking in upon the Original Constitution of rational Agents, and forcing us to be good, whether we will or no.

Mean while, the miserable state of such abandoned Sinners is very manifest, because that Restraint is taken off, which alone can preserve them from Ruin. For nothing more is necessary to their certain undoing, than to expose them to the assaults of their Spiritual Adversary, naked and destitute of proper Helps and Defence. In such cases, our Wills take part with the Enemy; and the Bias upon them is so strong, that there is no Crime so black, into which we are not capable of being drawn. Every Dispensation of Providence is then taken by the wrong handle; Conscience is silenced, Reason darkned, its first and brightest Impressions defaced, and even good Nature, and common Humanity, outgrown, and worn away. Thus *Herod*, when under the power of Anger, and Jealousy, and Envy, turned all the Warnings, and extraordinary Notices of the Messiah, into fresh Incentives to Treachery and Cruelty; Made use of his Authority to gratify his Revenge, and committed a Murder upon multitudes of Infants, which one would very hardly suppose it possible for a Prince, a Father, or indeed any manner of Man, to be guilty of.

And yet, whatever horror we conceive (and sure the utmost we can conceive, is no more than just, to such unrelenting Barbarity) even *Herod*, in his blackest Colours, is no other, than the true Image of every abandoned Sinner. For each of Us, when not enlightned, assisted, restrained, by the Grace of God, is liable to be as utterly lost to every sort of good Disposition, to be as vehemently bent upon the most detestable Wickedness, as this raging Prince in the full Career of his Fury. So very slippery is our Standing, unless we take good heed to be guided, by that unseen Arm that supports us: So very wretched are we all, when forsaken of God, and left to our selves; Such remorseless *Herods*, when at the Mercy of the Tempter, and in the Hand of our own ungoverned Passions. But,

IV. *Fourthly*, Some have objected against the Massacre of so many harmless Babes upon Christ's account, that it was a mighty hardship, and reflects upon the Justice, and Goodness, of the Divine Providence. So that I cannot think the subject of this Day spoken to as it ought, till some endeavour have been used to clear this Difficulty. In order whereunto, let it be remembred, that, from what was discoursed under the last Particular, it manifestly follows, that God is no farther concerned in This, or any other Crimes, than barely as he permits the Commission of them. And if, as was there argued, it be no imputation upon his Justice and Goodness, to suffer Men in the *Sin* of designing, and acting, the worst, the basest, the cruellest Villanies; Then the next, and only remaining Enquiry will be, whether the Providence of God be concerned to hinder the *Calamity*: That is, Whether it be any reasonable reflection upon the Wisdom, the Justice, the Goodness of God, who can forbid and defeat them, to suffer such Designs to take effect upon the Innocent, who are marked out, to be oppressed, or cut off by them.

Now here a mighty Difference must be made, between Men's suffering unjustly, with regard to Men, who are the next Actors and Instruments, and with regard to God, who is the remote Cause, of these Events to them. Men may afflict, crush, and murder those, who have given them no Provocation, and whom they have no manner of right to treat as they do. But God hath an universal and unlimited Dominion over us, as Creatures; and We have strengthened that Title yet more, by forfeiting our Lives, and all the Comforts of them, as Sinners. Consequently, how unjust soever any of our Sufferings may be, in respect of Men, who are the immediate Inflicters: yet in respect of God, of whose deserved Vengeance Men are the Executioners, the extreamest Sufferings of the very Best People never are, never can be, unjust.

But

But this is not all. For we are to consider the present Life, not as our last and final State of Being, but looking forward, and leading on, to another. Nor were we created and sent into the World, purely for This, but principally for that future, State. And so no certain Measure can be taken, no right or peremptory Judgment can be made, of God's Justice and Goodness towards us, without taking in the Distributions of that Life, which is the End of our Living at all. But now the Scriptures have expressly declared, that Sufferings are a part of our Discipline and Trial; that all the Sufferings of our mortal Condition shall be therefore recompensed, with immortal Happiness and Glory; and that, provided we receive our Punishment as we ought, whatever Offences are punished here, shall be forgiven hereafter.

Suppose a Servant then indebted to his Master, in a vast Sum of Money: Suppose him injuriously treated, and spoiled of his Goods, by a Fellow-Servant, to whom he owes nothing: If, what this Servant lose by such ill Treatment, be abated him, in the Arrear due to his Master, that Servant is no Loser by such Injury: And, if a great deal more be given him, in consideration of what was so wrongfully taken away; then it is plain, that, upon making up the whole Account, he is at last a Gainer by this Exchange. Now just thus our Great Lord deals with His Servants; And this Profit he turns all those things to, which his own Judgments, or the Malice of wicked Men, do, by his Connivance, lay upon them here below. So much as they endure with Meekness, and Patience, and a holy Resignation to his Divine Will; so much he discounts, from what they have deserved to endure hereafter. And, though this be not strictly the Case of the Innocents before us; Who, not being in a Capacity of inflaming their Reckoning, by actual and wilful Transgressions, could not stand in need of the same Deductions with others; Yet still the other Branch of the Argument holds good, which proceeds upon the giving

his Servants some better thing, in Reparation of the Losses, sustained in their present State. 'Tis allowed, these Infants wanted the Will of Martyrdom, which riper Years may have; But then it must be allowed too, that they were clear of that voluntary and actual Guilt, which those riper Years would have contracted. The whole Matter then seems to stand thus. Temporal Death is the Punishment of Original Sin. This God had a Right to inflict, and to choose his own Time and Manner of doing it. And therefore Convulsions, or a Fever, or any other mortal Disease, incident to that tender Age, is as much a Reflection upon the Providence of God, as the permitting them to fall by the Sword, a Sacrifice to the Rage of a merciless Tyrant.

But then for a frail, a short, a troublesome, a dangerous Life, God gave them the Recompence of an immortal, a securely happy, a completely glorious One. Happy in such a Degree, as to consider their Innocence and their Sufferings, and the noble Fruit, which might have sprung from those tender Plants, had they been allowed to grow to full Maturity. Herein then, not only the Justice of God is vindicated, but his Liberality, and the Goodness of his Providence, was glorified. For happy sure were They, who so quickly made their Port. Happy, who so escaped the Storms and Hazards, the Temptations and Defilements, of a boisterous and naughty World. Happy, who received so bountiful a Reward for that Injustice of a barbarous Murderer, who saved most effectually, whom he meant to destroy; and sent them before, into the Joy of Him, for whose sake they became a Prey to implacable Malice, and unrelenting Fury.

V. *Fifthly*, In the midst of so many melancholy Observations, we have this to comfort us, that *Herod*, notwithstanding all his Endeavours to make the Destruction of our Saviour sure, was yet disappointed. And indeed the Vanity of wicked Men is scarcely more conspicuous

in any one Instance, than in the fond Imaginations they flatter themselves with, of being able to compass their Ends, in rooting out those, whom God resolves to preserve. He may, and does, suffer their mischievous Intentions to succeed, sometimes, and in some degree; but, when he pleases to interpose, no Subtlety, no Force, not all the Counsels, not all the Armies upon Earth, not all the Stratagems in either, can prevail. For His is that watchful Eye, ever open to discover the Snares of Death laid for his beloved ones. His that over-ruling Hand, that hews them in pieces, and says to the Overflowings of Ungodliness, as well as to those of the Great Deep, *Hither shall ye go, and no farther, and here will I stop your proud Waves.* In short, he so orders the Matter, that, both by the Successes he permits, and by those he forbids, his own Glory, and the Good of his faithful Servants, shall most certainly be promoted.

The Ways of bringing this about are various. Sometimes he does it by an immediate, visible, and miraculous Exertion of his Almighty Power; And thus St. *Peter* was released out of Prison, Acts xii. when Chains, and Bars, and Iron-Gates, opened to him of their own accord. Sometimes by cutting short the Enemy, and sweeping them away with a swift Destruction; and thus the Host of *Affyrians*, who lay ready to devour *Jerusalem*, were in Isai. xxxvii. One Night slain by a destroying Angel. At other times, by preventing Surprises, giving timely Warnings, and furnishing Leisure and Opportunities for an Escape; and thus *Joseph* here was, Ver. 13. *with the young Child and his Mother*, dispatched away into *Egypt*. But be it by These, or by any other Methods, that such merciful Intentions take effect; still *It is the Lord's doing*: And the Natural Inference from hence, to all that attend to these Events as they ought, will be that mentioned by the Psalmist, Psal. lviii. 10. *Verily there is a Recompence for the*

Righteous, Doubtleſs there is a God that judgeth in the Earth.

Such are the Observations proper for this Festival, which we ſhall do well to improve, and apply in the following manner.

1. The diſmal Effects of *Herod's* Ambition and Rage, ſhould warn us always to behave our ſelves with Temper and Moderation. Eſpecially that we do ſo, when our Enemies, or thoſe that provoke us, lie at our Mercy. Greatneſs and Wealth are apt to turn our Heads. But the Effects of Inſolence to their Brethren are never more deplorable, than when Men have the Temptation of Power, to cruſh thoſe deſpiſed things that lie below them. Of all Perſons therefore Anger is leaſt proper for Princes, who can ſcatter Death and Deſolation, with a Word of their Mouths. And, in proportion, it muſt miſ-become all Superiors to their Inferiors: becauſe this Paſſion generally ſpurs Men on, to do the utmoſt they can do; and Men are ſcarce ever very angry, without being very unjuſt. 'Tis fit then this unthinking, unruly Evil, ſhould be held in with Bit and Bridle; and, the leſs any Man's Condition reſtrains him, from making his Reſentments of tragical Conſequence to others; the ſeverer Reſtraint, and more ſteady Government, ought ſuch a Man to keep over himſelf.

2. The Steps, taken by *Herod*, toward this deſperate Wickedneſs, ſhould particularly deter us from Hypocriſy and Diſſimulation. But above all, from that moſt impious Inſtance of it, the pretending Religion for a Cover to any unlawful and devilish Contrivances. For I cannot but think it proper to obſerve, that the Next thing we hear of *Herod*, after his diſſembled Intention to come and worſhip Jeſus, when his real Intent was to kill him, is the barefaced Butchery of this Day. And thus it often happens. Men find a formal Shew of Religion cannot compaſs thoſe Ends, it was put on to ſerve, or to diſguiſe; and then they preſently throw off the Maſk,
and

and lay aside all Shame, all manner of regard for God and their Duty. Nor is it indeed much to be wondred at, that those Wretches should be given over to the blackest of Crimes, and most fatal of all Delusions; who have sinned against their best Remedy, and prostituted the very Ordinances of God, to an Artifice for rendring themselves more successful, in carrying on the Service of the Devil.

3. What hath been argued in Vindication of the Divine Justice and Goodness, with regard to the Sin of *Herod*, and the Death of these Children, should dispose us to entertain, with Patience and much Meekness, not only the Sufferings laid upon us by God's immediate Hand; but likewise those, which we endure from the wrongful Dealings of wicked and unreasonable Men. The Injustice cannot, in this Case, be greater than *Herod's*, nor can our Innocence be more, than that of those Infants. Since then we have been taught by this Example, that Persons, the most inoffensive and undeserving, may be persecuted even to the Death, without any just Reflection, either upon their own Virtue thus oppress'd, or that Providence which permits it to be so oppress'd: Our Method in this Case should be, to take Sanctuary in the Peace of a good Conscience, to look up with a holy Resignation of Mind to the wise Disposer of every Event; and to trust his Mercy, for the necessary Comforts, the abundant Compensation, of all the Hardships he sees fit for us to undergo. Which yet we should not undergo any one of, were it not more for His Honour, nay, more for Our Advantage, to have it thus, than otherwise. For

4. The Remembrance of *Herod's* Disappointment should quicken, and establish our Hope and Faith in God. When Dangers hem us in, and our *Enemies on every side thrust sore at us that we may fall*, then let us call to mind, that He, who rescued his own Son, can never want means to deliver any Son and Servant of His, when such

such Deliverance is seasonable and proper. But temporal Deliverances are not always Seasonable, not always most beneficial. And therefore our chief and most earnest Desire should be, that we may find his Assistance and Protection always at hand, to support us in our Spiritual Encounters. For, let our present Difficulties be what they will, all will certainly be well at last, provided he do but grant the Petition offered up to him this Day; That is, *So to mortify and kill all Vices in us, that by the Innocency of our Lives, and the Constancy of our Faith even unto Death, we may Glorify his holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

The Sunday after CHRISTMAS-DAY.

The COLLECT the same with that of
Christmas-Day.

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

Galat. iv. 1.

1, 2. I would not be thought, by any thing that went before, to derogate from the just Privileges of the Jewish Church. 'Tis certain

1. **N**OW I say that the Heir, as long as he is a Child, differeth nothing from a Servant, though he be Lord of all.

2. But is under Tutors and Governours, until the time appointed of the Father.

they were designed by God to inherit the Promises made by God to Abraham, from whom they descended. But the difference between that and the Christian Dispensation, may be conveniently enough represented, by the case of an Heir under Age. Who, though he have an undoubted Title to his Father's Estate, is yet, during his minority, kept under such discipline, as is proper for the Circumstances of his Age and Education, and committed to the Care of Directors and Teachers, who exercise Authority over him, as if he were a common Servant. And this subjection he continues in, till the state of Manhood, and the time, prefixed for his taking possession of his Estate, is come.

3, 4, 5. Thus, though the Church of God, like that Heir, was still but one and the same, yet it was treated differently, according to the different Exigencies and Capacities of the Per-

3. Even so We, when we were Children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

4. But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law.

5. To redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of Sons.

sons whereof it was composed. In its imperfect State, with more Rigour, burthensome Ceremonies, and such servile Instances of Obedience, as were suited to the state of its Childhood. But, when arrived to maturity, the method was changed. For then God sent his own Son into the world, who was born of a Virgin, and submitted to that Law then in force; that by his punctual observance of it, they who, till then, lived under it, might be freed from any farther obligation to observe it. And, thus freed, might be adopted for his sake into Sons, come under a more manly way of living, and pay from thenceforth an Obedience, agreeable to the Liberty and the Privileges of Sons.

6. *And because ye are Sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your Hearts, crying Abba Father.*

his own Natural and Begotten, to you his adopted, Sons, Which assures you of this Adoption, and that you may now call and address your selves to God as a Father, with all the confidence of being owned and accepted by him, which that relation can justify, and uses to inspire.

7. *Wherefore thou art no more a Servant but a Son; and if a Son, then an Heir of God through Christ.*

Act henceforth not like a Servant, but consider thy self as a Son, nay as an Heir; for Sons adopted are always such. And such art Thou, an Heir through hope of the Kingdom and Glory, which Christ, God's natural Son, hath by Birthright: and Thou in right, and for the sake, of what he hath done for thee.

6. As a Consequence and Proof of which Sonship, this common Father hath communicated the Spirit of

7. Remember then the dignity, to which thou art exalted, and assert the Privileges belonging to it.

COMMENT.

THE Apostle's main Design in this Epistle, and particularly in that Portion of it now before Us, is to justify the Liberty, taught and taken by Christians, in not submitting to the Yoke of the Jewish Law; To assert the Pre-eminence of the Gospel above that Law; And to shew, how that Liberty, he so strenuously argues for, came to belong to the Disciples of Jesus Christ.

For a right understanding, wherein the true Force of his Reasoning upon this Occasion lies, it will be necessary to observe these following Particulars.

1. He allows, and maintains, the Church of God to have been all along One and the Same. And therefore the Jewish, and the Christian Church, when opposed to each other, are to be looked upon, not as Two collective

lective Bodies, perfectly distinct; but as One Body, under different States and Capacities. This is very evident, from the *Five* First Verses of the Chapter, which illustrate the Matter, by a Comparison, taken from a very familiar Instance in civil Affairs. A Comparison, not of Two different Persons, an Heir and no Heir; but of One and the same Person with himself, distinguished according to different Times and Circumstances; the Heir while a Child, and the Heir arrived to Maturity of Age and understanding; The Former at the *First* and *Third*, with the Latter at the *Fourth* Verse.

2. These Dispensations are to be understood, not as contrary, but only introductory, the One to the Other. This is evidently the meaning of that Passage, in the Third Chapter, Ver. 24. which calls *the Law* our *Pædagogus*, or *Schoolmaster*, to bring us to Christ. So is it likewise of the Allusion here, which describes the *Elements of the World*, as a *Bondage expedient for Children*, a Discipline fitted to the Imperfection of Beginners; and consequently to cease in course, when the Condition of the Parties concerned in it, should render them capable of a more liberal Treatment, and more perfect Methods of Instruction. Accordingly it follows, in that other place just quoted, *But after that Faith is come, we are no longer under a Schoolmaster.*

Chap. iii. 25.

And this gives us one good Reason, why the Design of our Redemption, by the Teaching, and Incarnation, and sufferings of the Son of God, though laid from all Eternity, was yet put in Execution no sooner. God, in this, like the rest of his Dealings with Mankind, condescending to, and suffering their Weaknesses; waiting till *the fullness of time was come*; and bringing them forward, by such gentle and leisurely Steps, as their present Condition qualified them for. But of this I have elsewhere given a more large Account, and mention it here, only by the way.

Ver. 4.

Boyle's Lectures
1701. Sermon. 6.

3. When

3. When the Adoption, and the Graces of the Spirit, the Sonship and Inheritance, are here ascribed to the Gospel, as its proper Effects and Privileges ; This is not so to be understood, as if none of those good Men, who lived before our Lord's appearing in the Flesh, had any part at all in such Advantages. For many excellent Persons there were, even then, whose Faith was vigorous and penetrating enough, to see through the Veil, and, who, if I may so say, did anticipate these clearer Revelations, and the Benefits of the New Covenant. As on the other hand, there are vast Numbers now, who, though the Veil be long since done away, yet have it to this Day upon their Hearts. But neither the One, nor the Other, of these Cases affects the Apostle's Argument in the least. And that for this plain Reason. Because the Comparison here proceeds, not between Persons and Persons, but between Dispensation and Dispensation: Not between These, again, so far as the One resembled, prefigured, implied, concurred with, the Other ; but in respect of those parts only, which are peculiar to Each, and quite distinct from the Other. Much less between These, *Lastly*, With regard to the Effects actually produced by Either ; But purely with regard to their respective Genius and Temper, and their Aptness and natural Tendency to produce such or such Effects. And therefore, as it is no just Reflection upon the Gospel, that Some, who live under it, are still acted by a *Spirit of Bondage* ; Because this is the Fault of the Men, and not of the Dispensation: So neither is it any just Commendation of the Law, that Some under That too were acted even then by a *Spirit of Adoption* ; Because this was not the Excellence of the Law strictly taken, but of the Men ; whose more advanced Piety, and Spiritual Knowledge, attended to those Dawnings of the Gospel, which at that distance shone in upon their Hearts. And to the Influence of these it was, not to the Law, considered abstractedly and apart from the Gospel, that those then

uncommon

uncommon Attainments, and Privileges, were entirely owing.

4. From hence it will be no hard Matter, in the *Fourth* Place, to state the true Difference between these Two ; and to explain, wherein the Prerogatives of the Gospel above the Law consist. The Law burdened Men with Carnal Ordinances, and Ceremonies in themselves unprofitable. Ordinances, that had a Spiritual Meaning, but such, as few of the Persons, exercised in them, entred into ; Ceremonies too of use, so far as they were Typical ; but the Shadow was so thick, as greatly to intercept the Substance. The Gospel propounds to us a Service entirely rational, and pure, and Spiritual. It leaves no Cloud between, to confound our Sight ; but carries us directly to Jesus Christ, the Antitype, the Accomplishment, *The End, of the Law to every one that believeth*. The Promises and Threatnings then were Temporal in Terms, though of Mercies and Punishments Eternal by Implication : But these are now expressly of Things Future and Eternal ; and the Temporal are no longer the proper Rewards, but only the Additional Encouragements, of our Obedience. The Revelations of the Divine Will were then partial and dark, they are now explicit and full. The Graces of the Holy Spirit were then sparingly exhibited, and few seem to have received them in large Measures ; because that few gave themselves the Trouble of applying to the Spiritual Mysteries, signified by the outward Figures : This Spirit now is distributed liberally, to all who are disposed to ask, and receive, and improve by it. But still the Assistance of the Spirit was a Gospel-Privilege, and never belonged to the Law, farther than that *First* included this *Second* Covenant. Hence was the Service then mercenary, and the greater part, who paid it, were acted by a Principle of Fear ; The Scourge always over them, and the Wages down in hand ; The Work toilsome, and the Profit small : But Ours now proceeds upon more generous

nerous Motives, as inspired by Faith and Love. Our Business is more manly and ingenuous; Our Expectations vast, beyond what we are able to ask or think: And not an Hire, but an Inheritance. So distant is the Condition, of those Servants, and these Sons: Of an Œconomy, under which it was very rare to rise above the Station and Disposition of Servants; and of One, in which nothing servile remains, but all are in a Capacity, of being *Sons*, and not only *Sons*, but *Heirs*, of *God through Christ*.

Now, in regard this is a Promotion, the conferring whereof *St. Paul* makes the peculiar Glory of the Gospel, and an Effect worthy our Lord's Incarnation to procure for us; And consequently such, as a right Apprehension of must needs raise our Thankfulness and our Wonder, while our Hearts are still warm with the annual Remembrance of that Mystery of Love: Wisely to be sure, does the Church offer it to our Meditation this Day. And, in hope to serve the good Purposes of Her doing so, my present Discourse shall be employed upon it.

The Privilege of being Sons and Heirs is here represented as One, the Latter a necessary Consequence of the Former. And it is our inestimable Happiness, that these are never separated in Fact. But so it is likewise, that when they be (as be they may) separated in our Consideration; Each of them singly suggests such Variety of Matter, as would more than suffice for the usual Limits of a Discourse. And therefore I shall now confine myself to the *First*, reserving the *Second* for another Opportunity, which the Method I am engaged in, will put into my Hands hereafter*.

* *Epistle for
8 Sunday after
Trinity.*

The Manner of treating this Subject shall be

I. *First*, To shew, under what Notion or Character it is, that Christians are properly the *Sons of God*.

II. *Secondly*,

II. *Secondly*, To observe what are the Conditions, that concur to the making that Title good to us. But

III. *Thirdly* and principally, To press upon you some Reflections, proper to possess us with a becoming Sense, both of our Advantage, and our Duty, upon this Occasion.

I. *First*, I begin with shewing, under what Notion or Character it is, that Christians are properly the Sons of God. And it is necessary to explain this Point, because this Relation to God is attributed in Scripture, to very different Subjects, and upon very different Accounts. He

* Job xxxviii.
28.

† Ibid. v. 7.

† Luke xx. 36.

* Luke iii. 38.

† Luke i. 35.

† Rom. viii. 32.

* 1 John v. 1.

† John iii. 16.

† John i. 1.

x. 30.

Rom. ix. 5.

Heb. i. 2, 3.

is called the * *Father of the Rain*, and *Begetter of the Drops of Dew*, because the Inanimate Parts of the Creation derive their Being from him. The Angels are called *his* † *Sons*, because Spirits of a Spirit, and so nearest resembling him, of any part of created Nature. So are the Spirits of Good Men departed to a State of Immortality, because *they cannot die* † *any more*, and in this *are equal to the Angels*.

* *Adam* is called so, because framed by his immediate Hand. The Blessed Jesus is called so, because formed in the Womb of an unblemished Virgin, by the † Operation of the Holy Ghost. But he is so called, yet more properly, because his † *own*, his * *begotten*, his † *Only Son*, because of the same Nature, and One † with him from all Eternity. Now it is manifest, that, of these several Acceptations, Some cannot possibly belong to us at Any time; Others not now, though they may hereafter; And of the Rest, which may at present, none can be peculiar to us, as Christians. And yet, under this Character alone, we are here entitled Sons; and at the same time told, how we were made so, which is by *Adoption*.

Now

Now Adoption, (as appears from the Laws and Customs of the Countries where it hath obtained) is an Act of Favour, whereby the Master of an Estate takes Persons of another Stock, and receives them, as his own Children. These Persons so received, if Slaves before, are hereby freed of course; Vinn. in Inst. Tit. xi. Lib. i. And then, as Freemen they take the Name, and succeed to a right of the Inheritance, of the Adopter. All which was publickly transacted, and the mutual consent of all Parties solemnly declared, before a publick Magistrate. This is the Account given us of that, which the Lawyers call'd *Adrogation*, or perfect *Adoption*. A Method, contrived for the continuance of Names, and support of Families; and for the consolation of Those, who either might have expected, but never had any Children; or who were by Death deprived of them they had.

They, who at all understand the nature and use of Similitudes, are not so unreasonable, as to require in Any Case, an exact agreement in every Circumstance. Much less can we expect it, where God and Men, and their respective Actions, are the Terms of the comparison. It ought to content us in this Case, if there be resemblance sufficient to justify the allusion; and, that this hold so far, in some of the main Strokes, as to give us a tolerable notion of the thing, and to render that expression more proper than any other.

Now here is, in like manner, an act of marvellous Grace, in suffering Wretches, who before were Aliens and Strangers, nay Slaves to the Enemy of Souls, and sold under Sin, to be first taken into Liberty, and then into the Family of that God, from whom they had estranged themselves. And this too, upon the Death of an only Son, not reducing his Father indeed to any want of natural Issue, or a necessity of supplying himself this way; but taking our Nature, and becoming the Son of Man, that we might thereby become the

Sons of God. Dying in that Nature to deliver us from the Curse, to which every Partaker of it was liable; and so purchasing for us that Freedom, which was a necessary qualification, and step to our Adoption. Devolving by this means his Merits, and his Claims, upon Us; drawing us as near to a Natural Sonship, as the Condition of the thing would bear. Vouchsafing to be One with us, and in us; And to make Us One with, and in Him; and so to convey to us a good and legal assurance of a share, (as large a share as we are capable of) in those Advantages, and Glories, and Royalties, which he hath an indefeasible right to, by natural Descent.

Rev. i. 5, 6.

Thus the Son is said to have *loved us, and washed us in his own Blood*, and to have made *us Kings and Priests unto God and his Father*. Thus it is said, that *He which Sanctifieth, and they who are Sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them Brethren*; that in regard *the Children are partakers of flesh and blood*, he also himself took part of the same, that *through Death he might deliver them, who were all their life time subject to bondage*. Thus the Father is said to

Ephes. i. 5, 6, 7.

have *predestinated us to the Adoption of Children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good Pleasure of his Will, to the Praise and Glory of his Grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, in whom we have Redemption through his Blood*. And once more, in the

Ver. 4, 5.

Scripture now under Consideration, that *God sent forth his Son*, (and consequently a Son before he was sent forth;) that this Son was *made of a Woman*, (very Man of the Substance of his Virgin Mother) *made under the Law*, (submitting to, and punctually discharging those temporary Ordinances, which he came to abolish) for so it follows, *to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the Adoption of Sons*.

From

From all this it appears, that, so far as the free Goodwill of the Adopter, and the Advantages accruing to the Persons Adopted, are concerned; the Allusion is just and good. And these are the Principal Parts in the Comparison. If the Motives to it, and the Methods made use of in it, do not come up to the same resemblance, we are not to wonder. Because this is an instance of Love, of which none but God, who is Love it self, was capable. And therefore we must not, among Men, look to meet with any think like it, any thing near it. Somewhat more of likeness however we may discover, with regard to the mutual Consent required in common Adoptions, under that which I proposed for my

II. *Second Head.* The Conditions I mean, that must concur, for making this Title good to us. Which, I think, two or three plain Texts may suffice to shew; Such as that in the *First of St. John's Gospel*, at the *twelfth and thirteenth*, *As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name; which were born, not of Blood, nor of the will of the Flesh, nor of the will of Man, but of God.* That this *receiving Christ*, and *believing on his Name*, are terms of like importance, and explanatory of each other, we need no other proof, than that given us in the *Third of this Epistle*. Where *St. Paul* describing (as here) the Privileges of Christians released from the Jewish Yoke, says, *After that Faith is come, ye are no longer under a School-master, for ye are all the Children of God by Faith in Christ Jesus: For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.* And once more, in a Passage parallel to this I am now upon, *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.* And, how we are to attain that guidance, I take to be evident, from this Declaration to *Titus*, that

Gal. iii. 25, 26, 27.

Rom. viii. 14.

Tit. iii. 5.

God, according to his mercy hath saved us by the washing of Regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; and

that other of our Blessed Lord himself,
John iii. 5. Except a Man be born of Water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

The Sum then of the *Second* Particular amounts to thus much. That God, of his infinite Goodness to Mankind, hath condescended to advance them to an honourable and happy State, a near Relation to himself, such as by Nature they had not, could not have. That this however (though all are capable of it, by Vertue of that Death, which is a ransom sufficient for all) is a Blessing, not conferr'd on all promiscuously: That Faith in Christ is a necessary qualification for it; and this Faith, solemnly professed in the Sacrament of Baptism, where we enter into Covenant with God, profess to be, and are accepted for, His. And, since that Water is accompanied by the Spirit, since the conferring that Spirit is not only the Privilege, but the Proof of our Sonship;

Catechism, Answer 2. Baptism of Infants and ripen Years.

Most truly does our Church teach us to confess that *In Baptism we were made the Children of God*; most properly after the administration of that Sacrament, does She yield hearty Thanks to God, that he hath regenerated the Party by his Holy Spirit, received him for his own by adoption, and made him an Heir of everlasting Salvation. The short is, This Adoption belongs to us, not as we are Creatures, or Men, but as we are Believers, and new Creatures in Christ. Nor is this limitation of the Blessing any Detraction from the freedom of the Gift, or the bounty of the Giver: His Love and Goodness still continues the sole efficient and impulsive Cause. These only moved him to bestow it at all. And therefore, as we have no occasion to complain of his imparting it to whom, and upon what terms, he sees fit: So is it still more worthy such a Father, not to vouchsafe the Dignity of Sons, to them that would prove a reproach

proach to the Family they are taken into. 'Tis Grace, must make us what Nature cannot; and the Spirit of Him in our Hearts, who died to redeem us from all Iniquity, that alone can warrant us, without arrogance or vanity, to call the Great Lord of Heaven and Earth, what He, to whom we owe this Relation, was pleased to stile him, when he calls his Disciples *Brethren, His Father and Our Father, His God and Our God.* John xx. 17.

Having thus, as I hope, sufficiently explained the Nature, and the Conditions, of our Adoption to be Sons of God, I come to

III. The *Third* and *Last* part of my Design; which is, To press some Reflections, that may make us sensible both of our Privilege, and our Duty, upon this occasion.

I. The *First* of these Reflections St. *John* hath propounded to you already, in the *Third* of his First Epistle. *Behold, what manner of Love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God.* Upon Us, whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, learned or ignorant, high or low, rich or poor. So differently does the King of Heaven dispense his Favours, from the manner in use with his Vicegerents upon Earth. These, tho' exalted in Dignity only, but still the same in Nature, admit not Those of their fellow Creatures, their fellow Members, their Brethren, so much as to tread their Courts, or to make up their train, whom either meanness of Fortune, or deformity of Person, or any of those Miseries, which need the benefit of such access most, have rendered Objects of Pity. Yet even These the Son of God is not *ashamed to call Brethren*; Even These the Father Almighty does not disdain for his Children: But contracts, invites to, the closest Alliances, between the Majesty of God, and the very vilest of that Dust and Ashes fram'd by him into Man.

So different again is This from the common Adoptions, where the Persons taken in, were, Either distant Kindred, or generally Such, as had somewhat very extraordinary to recommend them. But We, besides the meanness of our Condition by Nature had no deserts to boast, nothing but what might raise an aversion against us, no Privileges, but what had been abused to the Giver's Dishonour before. And yet, from this fallen State of Guilt and Unworthiness, Misery and Despair, we are translated to Favour, and a Hope full of Immortality; from Strangers and Enemies, to Friends and Children; from being the deserved Objects of God's Hatred, and *Vessels of Wrath fitted to Destruction*, we are embraced in the arms of his Mercy, and cherished in the bosom of a Father. So much more tender is His Affection, so much more kind and free Our Adoption, than any other ever was, or could be.

And, as more free, so more beneficial too. For What could the Great Ones upon Earth advance their adscititious Children to? An uncertain Honour, or a perishing Possession, a swelling Title, or an ancient Name. Alas! how poor and little things are these, in comparison with the Favour of a God unchangeable, a treasure in Heaven, nay a Crown of Glory! We are weak enough oftentimes to bear our selves wondrous high, upon the Pompous Pageantry of a long Pedigree; Upon Honours not our own; and perhaps, if the whole Secret were out, not our Ancestors neither, upon any very creditable Account. (The Effects of Extortion or Bribery, of Falshood or Treachery, of obsequious ministring to the Vices of one above them, exorbitant in his Pride, arbitrary in his Measures, or Brutish in his Lusts.) These wretched Appearances serve to keep People above Contempt, who have nothing of personal worth to skreen them from it. But the Relation, I am treating of, is an Honour indeed. It lets us into the noblest Alliances, It cannot be blown upon by Faction, or sacrificed
to

to popular Fury ; It is never given promiscuously, never taken away unjustly. In a Word, to discern this wonderful Love in some tolerable Measure, let us endeavour to frame some Idea of the Natural and Only begotten Son of God ; and then consider, that His Bliss and Glory are reflected down upon the adopted Sons. So near Approaches are permitted us, so honourable now is our Condition, from the most wretched and scandalous that could be ; that, as He, who is Love it self, would not give less, it does not appear how We could receive more, and still continue to be Men.

2. *Secondly*, The Consideration of our being God's Children is, both a mighty Encouragement in our Duty, and a Direction, with what Spirit and Temper we should go about it. This secures us from all those Instances of Rigour and Arbitrary Power, which are imposed, to preserve the Authority of the Commander, and keep those of inferior Condition at an awful Distance. But the Power of every wise Parent is tempered with Tendernefs, and Respect to Children ; and requires such Acts of Obedience only, as are ingenuous, fit for their Quality, and such as carry their own Motives to compliance along with them.

This likewise takes off that Horror and Dread, wherewith Men, under an absolute and imperious Master, are apt to be confounded ; and begets a reasonable Presumption of kind Allowances, and great Compassion, at a Father's Hand. 'Tis upon these Accounts, that St. *Paul* prefers the Gospel-Oeconomy above the Law ; calling the Former *the Spirit of Bondage unto Fear*, but the Latter, *The Spirit of Adoption*, Rom. viii. 15. whereby we cry *Abba Father*. That shewed Men their Guilt, burdened their Consciences with Horror and Confusion, but turned them over to the Gospel, for Comfort and Relief. For the Gospel alone shews God in Goodness and Mercy, reconciled by the Death of his Son. This lays aside the terrible Aspect of the Taskmaster and the Judge, and brings the mild indulgent Countenance

of the Parent, to succeed in its Place. Thus the Psalmist does, and thus our own Experience may teach us to describe him. *Like as a Father pitieth his own Children, so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear him; for he knoweth whereof we are made, he remembreth that we are but Dust.* This gives us Confidence, that he, for many Backslidings, many Wandrings and Strayings, will not yet utterly cast us off, provided we do but amend at last; And that, whenever we return, it is not possible for us to desire more passionately to be well received, than he does, that we would give him the Opportunity, of shewing how kindly he is disposed to receive us. Much more does this assure us, that our slips will be overlooked, our Failings kindly interpreted, our Weaknesses pitied, every thing not directly voluntary not charged in Account to us; but our honest, though very poor, Endeavours to please graciously accepted. For none but *Egyptian* Tyrants demand Brick without Straw; And Fathers, least of any, require from Children, what they are sensible it is not in their Power to perform.

Hence then we are plainly directed, that the Spirit, most becoming a Christian in his Duty, is such, as inspires Vigour and Life, Hope and Joy, a Holy Confidence, a cheerful and affectionate Obedience. To carry the Torment of Fear about perpetually, and act upon Principles put into us by the Scourge and the Gibbet, is the Misery of Slaves; Unworthy the Character of Free-men, and by no Means agreeable, either to the Dignity of a Christian, or the Honour of God. For God is most glorified by our Service, when That is made our Choice, and springs from Thankfulness and Love; When we are fearful to offend, because loth to displease; When our Diligence speaks our Desire of giving Satisfaction; and the Manner of going about it shews, we take Delight in our Business, and are content with our Wages, and have a true respect for Him we serve. This is the true Temper
of

of every good Servant, much more of every good Child; who cannot, ought not at least to, consider his Parent's Indulgence, without inferring from thence his own Obligations to serve him with Faithfulness, and to serve him with Gladness too. And therefore, it were in Us most inexcusable to do otherwise, who have, as Christians, the highest Obligations of this kind: A Father whose Goodness is infinite, and a Service, that is perfect Freedom.

3. This Consideration, that we are Sons of God, should make us exceeding ambitious to be like God. Among Men, we know, such Resemblances are usual; and extend, not only to Features of Body, but to Temper of Mind, nay to all the Manner and Behaviour of the Parent. And such Likeness is commonly very engaging. So that a more than equal Measure of Tenderness, and Delight, follows the liveliest Image of the Father. Now, how far we are from any possibility of being like God in our Natural Frame, needs not be said; But, in the Disposition of the Soul, we may and must arrive at some Resemblance of him. Holiness and Purity, Justice and Charity, and all his communicable Excellencies, may be drawn, though drawn in Miniature only, upon our Hearts. And to such Strokes of Likeness St. Paul exhorts, when he bids us *be Followers of God as dear Children*: And our Blessed Saviour when commanding the Love of our Enemies, that we may *be the Children of our Father which is in Heaven*. Both, it is worth observing, urge the Necessity of the Resemblance, from the Nearness of the Relation. But St. John hath a most remarkable Text to this Purpose. *Beloved now are we the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. Now, if our Happiness hereafter will consist in being like God, and that likeness again will follow upon

Eph. v. 1.
Matth. v. 44,
45.

1 John iii. 2.

upon our nearer Approach to, and more distinct Knowledge of him : Then it is plain, that our constant Desire, and Care, yea and truest Happiness, in the mean while, must be to see, and know, and imitate, as much of him as we can. And that we are extremely to blame, and wanting to our selves, in not labouring to approach the Perfections of His Nature ; Which is indeed but to finish and consummate those of our Own. This is what he expects, that the Distinction of our Family should be visible upon us. And, if it be remembred,

1 John iii. 7, 8,
9, 10.

that there is no middle Race of Men, but

all are either the Children of God, or Children of the Devil ; And that the doing, or not doing, Righteousness is a manifest Mark, to which of these Two every Man belongs. This is enough to shew the necessity of a good Life, for attracting our Heavenly Father's Love. For sure, to preserve this Divine Relation inviolate between God and Us, I need not say, 'tis necessary we be not Children of the Devil.

4. If all Christians be the Children of God, then are they likewise all mutually allied to one another ; And that, in such Degree, as induces the strongest Engagements to Justice, and Peace, and Charity. When *Moses* interposed between Two *Israelites*, he thought this would, he knew it ought to have been, Motive sufficient

Acts vii. 26.

for making up the Quarrel. *Sirs, ye are Brethren, why do ye Wrong one to another?*

The Mischiefs and Hatred of Strife and Division are but too many and too manifest, in People of the greatest Distance from each other. But, when the Venom works under one and the same Roof ; when They, who came out of the same Bowels, and hung upon the same Breasts, are infected ; the whole House is presently in a Flame, and the Feuds grow too unnatural, and too scandalous to be borne. And yet even this is not more heinous, more absurd, than it is among Christians, who have *One Saviour, One Spirit, One Father* ; Who are purchased

with

with the same Blood, fed and brought up at the same Table, begotten and born anew by the same Grace, and consequently are one Flock, one Family, and ought to be of one Heart, and of one Soul. These near Degrees of Kindred should therefore be well thought upon. For, were they not forgotten, it is not easy to conceive, how Vices in this regard so monstrous, as Envy and Malice, Contention and Cruelty, or any manner of Hardheartedness, should ever get footing, where the Doctrine and Profession of the Gospel had already taken place.

5. We have, from this Relation to God, an excellent Support under Afflictions. These are represented unto us under the Quality of Chastisements; and the Corrections of good Parents are for the most part very gentle. Their Severity scarce ever more, seldom so much as is necessary. And many a time, when Provocations have lifted up the Hand, Nature steps in, and is sure to prevent, or moderate the Blow. In like manner hath our Heavenly Father his Tenderneſſes and his Yearnings too; his Mercies, and the Sounding of his Bowels, towards us. He declares, he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men. His Compassions are said to exceed those of the most affectionate Mothers: And, though his Wisdom restrain him from such indiscreet Fondness, as would spare, when we might profit by Punishment; Yet even then, when Justice must exert, Mercy abates the Strokes, and Wisdom directs the Remainder to excellent Purposes. So that, provided we submit with Patience, till his Ends are answered upon us, it is even good for us, that we were in trouble. And, although the Light of God's countenance may retire behind a thick black Cloud for a while; yet all the Father will shine forth again, not only in a happy Issue out of, but in a glorious Reward for, all our Afflictions.

Isai. lxiii.

Lam. iii.

Isai. lix.

6. *Lastly,*

6. *Lastly*, This Relation to God gives us assured hopes of a gracious answer to our Prayers, and sufficient supplies of all necessary Provisions. With regard to the Former, our blessed Saviour forbids the use of *vain Repetitions*; Upon this Consideration, *Matth. vi. 7, 8.* that our *Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him.* Asked indeed he will be; But he requires it, more for Our sakes, than his own. Not for the State and Formality of the thing; but to keep up in us a sense of our constant dependence upon his Goodness, and to draw us into a more intimate familiarity with himself, by these frequent applications to the Throne of Grace. And the remembrance of our being Children, when we come thither, teaches us, not only why, but how we ought to ask, *viz.* With a becoming Resignation of Mind, and all due Deference to His Wisdom, who knows better how to choose for us, than we do for our selves; With an humble confidence in his Goodness, that whatever he sees most expedient, shall never be refused us; And with a faithful perseverance in those Requests, which, though not always denied when delayed, are yet often delayed, for our much greater benefit. For God is the proper Judge, not only of the Things to be given, but of the Measures, and the Seasons of giving. And therefore to Them, who are careful to ask, with all the Duty and Reverence of Children, greater Encouragement cannot possibly be imagined, than the giving us leave to put him in mind what he is to us. And this we are not only permitted, but commanded to do, by Him, who taught us to begin our Prayers, with that most endearing of all Titles, *Our Father which art in Heaven.*

So again, when our Lord would moderate that anxious and inordinate Concern, which Mens Minds are so apt to be perplexed and tortured with, about the Necessaries of the present Life; he does it with this Reflection, that *our Heavenly Father knoweth*

we have need of all these things. Implying, that it can never consist with the Character of a Father, to leave us destitute of those Supplies, which it is always in His Power to furnish, and out of Our Power to subsist without. And the mistake of those, who are apt to think themselves neglected upon these Occasions, is *First*, that they make wrong Judgments of their own Condition, in supposing themselves to want, what really they do not: And then, that they stretch those Promises, which are our Security against the necessities of Nature, to so many Engagements, for Convenience, and Ease, and Abundance. And once again we should know, that even with respect to Necessaries, it makes no difference, whether we be supplied from our own, or from other, Hands; Whether by our Substance, or our Labour, or by the Liberality of those Friends, whom God raises up for us, in our Disability and Distress. For both these are the Lord's doings; and He, who hath obliged himself to furnish us, hath left himself at liberty, to choose what particular Methods he will furnish us by. But after all, the most effectual way of silencing all Distrusts or Murmurings of this kind, is, to consider, that this is a Spiritual Relation. Consequently, that the Comforts rising from it, though they extend to Wants of every kind, are chiefly such, as meet with our Spiritual Wants. Constant and seasonable Recruits of inward Strength and Grace, the Bread of Life, and Wine of elect Souls, the Mystical Banquets of the Body and Blood of Christ, and all the Supports and Refreshments, requisite to nourish us up unto Life Eternal; These are the Sustenance agreeable to such a Father. And in These, we may rest assured, he will never be wanting to his Children. Not only so; But when his Table has fed us, and we are grown up, by the Bounty of it, to the *fulness of the stature of perfect Men in Christ Jesus*; he hath laid up for us a plentiful Portion, and, like a truly provident Father, taken effectual care for

our future Settlement. A Settlement, durable beyond time it self; and ample and noble, as his own immortal Happiness. For This is the Sum of all our Privileges, This the Crown of all our Obedience and all our Expectations, that, *if we be Sons, then are we Heirs too, even Heirs of God through Christ.* Of which, as I propos'd in the beginning of this Discourse, (by His good leave and assistance) hereafter.

The GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

St. Matth. i. 18.

18. The Manner of Jesus being born of Mary, though not of Joseph, who is therefore only called Her Hus-

band, not his Father, (*Ver. 16.*) was indeed extraordinary and full of wonder. For thus it fell out: His Mother was the espoused Wife of Joseph, but, before any knowledge of her Bed, she was discovered to be with Child: And she was so, by the Operation of the Holy Ghost.

19. This Discovery cost Joseph much Perplexity. The Law in these Cases was very se-

vere; and he, loth to carry things to an Extremity, was desirous to save her both from Shame and Suffering, by a private Separation.

20. But these Troubles were soon compos'd by an Angel, sent to reveal the whole Secret, and to assure him, that all this was no

Stain, either upon his Wife's Honour, or His; that here was no Injury done him, but all was intirely the Work of the Holy Spirit of God.

21. Foretelling at the same time, that this Child should be a Son, and directing him to be called *Jesus*, a Name importing that Salvation from Sin, which all, who believe and obey him, should receive by his Means.

22. Thus it pleas'd God to fulfil a most remarkable Prophecy, gi-

18. **T**HE birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with Child of the Holy Ghost.

19. Then Joseph her Husband being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost.

21. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his Name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, saying,

ven by *Isaiah* to the House of *David*, as a Sign, that they should not be extinguish'd by the Calamities they then lay under the dread of.

23. *Behold, a Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his Name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us.*

son, that all Men should perceive the extraordinary Favour and Presence of God in him.

24. *Then Joseph being raised from sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his Wife.*

that (though before he durst not) now he dwelt with his Wife, in Obedience to the Command of the Angel, and in full Persuasion of her Virtue.

25. *And knew her not, till she had brought forth her first-born Son. And he called his Name Jesus.*

after the Birth of this her first-born Son: Who, as had been had that significant Name of *Jesus* given him.

23. That a pure Virgin should bring a Son, so remarkable a Blessing, so divine a Per-

24. This gave *Joseph*, who had otherwise most reason to be scrupulous, such entire Satisfaction ;

25. Yet so, as never to take any conjugal Liberties with her, till

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for this Day hath told us, that, *when the Fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a Woman* ; The Gospel proceeds in explaining that work of Wonder, and acquaints us particularly with the uncommon manner of his being so made. As therefore our Meditations, on the Day of his Nativity, were fixed upon the Glories of his Divine, so those of this Day more properly confine themselves to the Reality of his Human, Nature. Those shewed us *God of the Substance of his Father, begotten before the Worlds*, These shew us *Man of the Substance of his Mother, born in the World*. But both together give us a just Idea of that *One Christ, who is God and Man, perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable Soul and human Flesh subsisting*.

It is not without excellent good Reason, that the Person made choice of here, to be first satisfied in this extraordinary Conception, should be *Joseph* ; One, whose Relation to the Holy Mother, as it made him most

most concerned to have Satisfaction given him of her Virtue; so would it naturally render him cautious of being imposed upon in the Matter. Accordingly we find, by what Steps he came up to this Persuasion, from whence his Scruples rose, what Uneasiness they produced, and by what methods they were quieted. It was a customary thing with the Jews, for a considerable time to intervene, between the Espousals or Solemn Contract, and the Parties cohabiting, in all Points, as Man and Wife. During this Interval, 'tis plain, it was, that *Joseph's* frequent Conversation with his beloved Spouse, gave him Opportunities of discovering her to be with Child. And yet this was so ordered, that They, who knew nothing of the Mysterious manner of it, might reasonably enough suppose Him the Father of that Child; and so there was provided a sufficient protection for his Wife's Honour, against the Suspicions and Scandal of the World. With Child he found she was, by his own Observation, and apparent Signs of the thing. Which will seem less strange, if we compare the 26th, and 27th, with the 56th Verse of St. *Luke's* first Chapter. These place at least three Months, between their Espousals, and *Mary's* return to her own House, from a Visit made to her Cousin *Elizabeth*. With Child by himself he knew she was not; With an Adulteress he knew it both a Shame and a Sin to live; To expose her Life and Reputation upon this account he was loth; And, in the midst of these distracting Thoughts, he is let into the whole Secret, and set perfectly at ease, by the Method, related at large in this portion of Scripture.

The Substance and Design then of this Passage, you easily perceive, extends to the several parts of our Lord's Incarnation; considered with regard, *First*, To the Agent or Person effecting it. *Secondly*, To the Person passive in it, or Her, upon whom this miraculous Operation took place. And *Thirdly*, To an ancient and
very

very remarkable Prophecy, of which this Miracle was the proper and intended accomplishment. Of the Last of these I shall have a fit occasion to discourse at large hereafter, and shall therefore choose at present to confine my Thoughts to the Two former.

*For the Epistle of
Annunciation.*

First then, For a convenient understanding so much of our Lord's Incarnation, as falls within our compass, it is necessary to observe the Agent, or Person effecting this wonderful Conception. *She was found with Child of the Holy Ghost*, says *St. Matthew*. And accordingly the Angel, in *St. Luke*, resolves that question of the astonished Virgin, *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* by the following reply. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the Power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.* In these Words, agreeable to the usual Modesty, and great Decency, of Scripture-language, is implied all that action of the Holy Ghost, whereby the Virgin was enabled to become fruitful, and the place of ordinary Generation was in this case supply'd. For, that there was no Concurrence of any such Cause, not only She her self, in *St. Luke*, but the Angel, by whom She was visited, testifies. He therefore, for strengthening her belief of a Production so unexampled, so astonishing, declares it the Work of God, with whom She ought to remember, that *nothing is impossible*. To the same point this Evangelist is clear. Not only, when relating her Pregnancy, as antecedent to *Joseph's* and Her coming together, which excludes her Husband from any part in it: But much more, when applying to this matter a Prophecy of *Isaiab*, which yet could not be otherwise fulfilled, than by excluding every other Man, as well as her Husband.

Ver. 18.

Luke i. 35.

Luke i. 37.

Ver. 18.

Ver. 22, 23.

Now, when this action is in Scripture represented, as entirely the Work of God, and yet attributed to the Holy Gho. in particular: We are not to understand it so peculiarly His, that the Two other Persons, subsisting in the Godhead, should have no Concern in it. For here that Rule of the Schools takes place, *that* the entire Union of the Divine Nature makes all such Actions common to all Three, as do not refer to the Properties and Relations, by which they stand distinguished from each other. *Jesus* is therefore *the Son of God*, because conceived by the Spirit of the Father. And the same Son of God, who raised his own Body from Death and the Grave, formed that same Body in the Virgin's Womb; All which notwithstanding, this action is in more especial manner assigned to the Holy Ghost, though common to the Father and the Son; because Fructifying, and Sanctifying, are, in the Sacred Stile, generally attributed to His Influences. As therefore he began the

first Creation, by *moving* (or brooding as it were) upon the face of the Waters: So

did he here begin the New Creation, by conveying a Principle and Power of Fruitfulness, into a Person otherwise incapable of it. And yet, as There, without the

Father, and his Divine Word or Son,

not any thing was made that was made:

So did he Here bring this Second, this

Creation of a new thing to effect, by the same Co-operation of the whole undivided

Trinity, as he had done the Former.

But, although the Ends of an ordinary Generation were all answered by this Action; yet was it not, in all the Effects, agreeable to such. For common Fathers beget Sons of their own Likeness and Substance; and herein it is, that the Paternal Relation is properly founded. Now this could not be done in the present Case, because the Substance of the Holy Ghost is Eternal, Uncreated, Divine: But the Substance of Christ, conceived

conceived in, and born of, the Virgin, is Human, Created, and had a beginning in time. Therefore I said, that the Spirit enabled the Virgin to bring forth; Therefore Christ cannot, with any Propriety, be called the Son of the Holy Ghost; nor, strictly speaking, the Son of God, with reference to this Birth. He is indeed the Son of God, as Man, because (like *Adam*) an extraordinary Effect, from a Divine Cause, working after an extraordinary manner. But, strictly and truly, he is the Son of God, by virtue of his Eternal Generation alone; because, by this alone, he is *God, begotten of the Substance of his Father*. But a human Effect must have a human Cause. And, tho' the manner of Production was above Nature; Yet the Substance of Christ's Natural Body, to answer the end of his being born, must be made out of the Substance of some other natural Body. And what that was, we shall have occasion to consider by and by.

In the mean while that other Quality, observed just now to be more particularly attributed to the Holy Ghost, appears to have been concerned in this matter too; That I mean of Sanctifying, and rendring this Fruit of the Virgin, as the Angel most emphatically terms it, *That Holy thing,*

Luke i. 35.

which should be born of Her. He, who came into the World to cleanse others, could not perform this Office regularly, unless perfectly clean himself. But the Stain of our common Parent sticks so close to every natural Descendent of His, that the Human Nature cannot be ordinarily communicated without it. Hence grew an absolute Necessity, that the Saviour, and Sanctifier of the World, should be conceived, in a method, beside and above the usual course of Nature. Now He, that sprung from the immediate Operation of that Spirit, who is the Fountain of all Holiness and Purity; and that Operation too, upon the Person of an undefiled and blessed Mother; He hath effectually provided against all the Difficulties of common Births; is altogether un-

tainted with Lust or Sin, and so the *Lamb of God*, without blemish and without spot.

Secondly, That Chaste and Holy Mother is next to be considered, as the Other Party concerned in this Miraculous Birth. And there are Three respects, in which we shall do well to consider her. The *First* regards her own Person. The *Second* her Relation to Christ. The *Last* Her Virginity, notwithstanding that Relation.

As to the *First* of these, I cannot think it worth while to mention any particular significations of the Name *Mary*, or the fanciful Collections some Zealots have made from thence. 'Tis, no doubt, more material to our purpose, to take notice, that She is described

of the House and Lineage of *David*,
 of the Tribe *Judah*, espoused to a Descendent of the same Tribe and Family, and an Inhabitant of *Nazareth*. All this appears, not only from the Genealogies in *St. Matthew*, and *St. Luke*; but, by their going up together to *Bethlehem*, in Obedience to the Roman Emperor, who had commanded all the

Jews to be taxed or enrolled according to their respective Conditions, and at the Cities of the several Houses, from whence they sprung. Thus were those Prophecies fulfilled, of the *Christ*, springing from the Tribe of *Judah*, being the *Son of David*, and called a *Nazarene*. And, although the Scriptures seem chiefly careful, to give us the Pedigree of *Joseph*, for whose Son, not only in vulgar, but legal Estimation, *Jesus* was to pass; yet, when the Author to the *Hebrews* affirms,

Heb. vii. 15.

as a matter evident beyond all Contradiction, that *our Lord sprang out of Judah*;

this is a warrant sufficient, for concluding his Mother to have been of that Tribe. Because, were She not so, he did not spring from thence, as will appear more fully by and by.

The next thing then concerning her, is the Relation she bore to *Jefus*. *His Mother Mary*. And this She was, in the moſt ſtrict and literal Senſe. She is ſaid to have *conceiv- ed him in her Womb*, She nourished this Burthen; A neceſſary Conſequence of her *being great with Child*: She bore him about in her Body the uſual time of Mothers; for, while at *Bethlehem*, in order to be taxed, *the days were accom- pliſhed that ſhe ſhould be delivered*. Which Phraſe im- ports not any term of time, appointed for Her in particu- lar, different from the reſt of her Sex in like caſes; but that Seaſon, called elſewhere the *Time of Life, and the full time being come*. And then, and not before, it was, that *She brought forth her firſt born Son*, which is the laſt and finiſhing Circumſtance, neceſſary to make good the Title of *Mother*.

Matth. i. 18.

Luke i. 31. ii. 5.

Luke ii. 6.

Gen. xviii. 10.

Luke i. 57.

ii. 7.

Matth. i. 25.

He then, who was conceived in *Mary's Womb*, who grew there in proportion to other Children, who ſtay'd there the full time of other Births, who was nourish- ed, during that time, as others are, till ripe for the Birth; who, at the end of that time, was born after the manner of common Infants: He was as truly and properly Her Son, as any other is the Son of Her, who bore him. And *Mary*, in regard of Him, was as properly a Mother, as any other Woman is, or can be, of any Child whatſoever, in the ordinary way of Gene- ration.

May we not ſay indeed, that She was more pro- perly and ſtrictly a Mother, than any common Mother is or can be? For, whereas in the uſual courſe of Nature, Children partake in the Subſtance of both Parents, the Whole of Chriſt's human Subſtance was derived from Her alone. It having been ſufficiently proved already, that neither *Joſeph*, nor any Man what- ſoever, contributed the leaſt to this Production;

and consequently, that it was not of *the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man, but of God.*

But how of God? As an Efficient Cause *by which*, not as a material Cause *out of which*, this Substance was made. The same Almighty Power, that formed the first Woman out of Man alone, did upon this occasion form a Man, out of a Woman alone. And therefore that Prophecy, applied by the Author to the *Hebrews* to this purpose, expresses the thing with great exactness, *A body hast thou prepared, the Original is rather fashioned, fitted up for me.* But, though the formation was God's, the matter, of which he formed it, was *Mary's*. So that, as we truly confess Christ to be *God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the Worlds*, it is with equal Truth, that we believe him *Man of the Substance of his Mother, born in the World.*

He must have been so, to make good the antient Predictions concerning him. The Promise to *Abraham* ran, that *In his Seed all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed*; and the Seed there meant, *St. Paul* says expressly, *was Christ.* He was promised to *David*, as one to come out of His Loins; so that *the Son of David* was a title, in use to signify the *Messiah*. This is the *Root of Jesse*, and the *Righteous Branch*: But how? except he came of their Posterity, grew out from that Tree, and were essentially united to the Stock? He then, who was not so, in respect of *Joseph* or any other Man, from whom he received nothing: Nor in respect of the Holy Ghost, from whom he received only the Form; must have been so in respect of his Mother *Mary*: And so of Her, because, of Her proper and actual Substance, he received the Materials of his Human Nature.

Σῶμα κατῆ-
τίσω μοι Heb.
x. 5.
Gen. xxii. 18.
Galat. iii. 16.
Psal. cxxxii. 12.
xxii. 31.
Matt. xxi. 9.
Luke i. 32.
Isai. xi. 1.
Zech. vi. 12.

Therefore the Scriptures, with great Significance, call him *the Seed of the Woman, the Son of God made of a Woman*, and the like. None of which Titles could be proper, or so much as true, had the Virgin contributed nothing more upon this Occasion, than the carrying this Burthen, and bringing into the World a Body, miraculously framed, and conveyed into her, for that purpose: But that, which we are taught to believe of the matter, is this; That Christ's Human Nature was entirely taken from his Mother; That, by a wonderful Efficacy of Almighty Power, his Body was formed, not only in her, but of her; That thus he truly became, what otherwise he could not have been, *The Seed of Abraham and David, according to the Flesh*. Mary was therefore, upon all Accounts, strictly and Literally his Mother; and, upon some Accounts, more strictly so, than any other Woman ever was the Mother of any other Child.

Gen. iii. 15.
Gal. iv. 4.

Matth. i. 1.
Rom. i. 3.

Thirdly, The *Last* thing, which calls for our Observation under this Head, is, the pure inviolate Virginity of this Mother. A Truth clear, as from sundry positive Texts, so particularly from the Passage now before us, and those already alledged, in this Discourse upon it. For, if not only *Joseph*, but all Mankind, are excluded from any part in this supernatural Production; then the Conception of *Jesus* did not alter the Purity of her State. And thus far Scripture carries us expressly. *Ver. 25.*

Now this is a Circumstance, the more important, by reason the Truth of God was concerned in it; and, that it had been long before delivered, as one of the distinguishing Characters of the *Messiah*. To this Purpose, not Christians only, but some Ancient *Jews* have applied that of *Jeremiah*, *The Lord hath created a new thing in the Earth, a Woman shall compass a Man*. The Words, in Propriety of Speech, suit well with This Construction. and none of

Jer. xxxi. 22.

Theirs, who would evade it, answer at all to the Solemnity of that Preface, to the Genius of the Prophetick Stile, or to the Strangeness of any Event, deserving to be termed *The Lord's creating a new thing upon the Earth*. But that of *Isaiab* is yet more full and particular, and this, the Holy Ghost himself assures us, was actually fulfilled in the Birth of our *Jesus*. So that, if we

Isai. vii. 14.

Ver. 22, 23.

are content to accept the Spirit of God for a good Interpreter of Prophecies dictated by himself, here can remain no reasonable Doubt. For in this Case we are not left to the Applications of mere Men; But the same Holy Ghost, who predicted so wonderful an Event by the Prophet, hath by the Evangelist pointed out that Event, explained his own Meaning, and determined the Prediction to our Hand.

Thus a chaste Virgin became a Mother. Thus was our *Jesus* a *Holy Thing* throughout. A High-priest, every way qualified for his Office; as being, from the very Womb, *harmless, undefiled, and separate from Sinners: Who, when he offered for the Sins of the People, had no need to offer first for his own*. And, upon that Account, we may depend upon the Power of that Sacrifice, to expiate effectually the Sins of Others.

Heb. vii. 26, 27.

Thus have we, under the Conduct of Scripture, taken such a View as we may, of the Son of God *coming down from Heaven, Incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and made Man for us Men and for our Salvation*. And, how astonishing, or remote soever from the ordinary Course of Nature, this Doctrine may seem; it is yet no more, than every Christian professes to believe, when repeating those Words daily in the Apostle's Creed, *Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary*. An Argument, so fruitful in pious and seasonable Reflections, that it would ask many Discourses to mention, but no Number can ever exhaust them. I will there-

therefore conclude with adding some few more, to those, which have already been offered upon the like Occasion.

How gloriously the Power, the Wisdom, the Justice, the Goodness, of Almighty God manifested themselves, in the Incarnation of the Blessed Son; What lively Faith, what fervent Love, what extensive Charity, what profound Humility, the Contemplation of this Mystery ought to produce in us, hath been my Endeavour to make my Reader sensible of Formerly. Think me not inconsistent with my self, if from the very same Mystery I make it now my

*Epistle and Gospel
for Christmas-
Day.*

1. *First* Endeavour, earnestly to recommend such a true Greatness of Soul, as may incline every Christian, to value himself upon this Occasion, much above the rate, that the generality of Men are wont to do. The Sin of Pride St. Paul hath well described, *by thinking of our selves more highly than*

Rom. xii. 3.

we ought to think. But yet I make no Difficulty to affirm, That the not thinking of our selves so highly as we ought to think, is one of the worst and most destructive Evils, we can possibly be guilty of. And, as high Thoughts may be qualified, and employed, and improved, it is not easy to exceed in them. For there is in all Sin a Meanness of Spirit, and a Disparagement to our Nature: Which did we but rightly attend to, it were scarce possible we should submit to, much less delight in, those Dispositions and Habits, which are the foulest Blemish, the vilest Debasement and Reproach, that can any manner of way come upon us. Hence is that wise and useful Advice of some Old Philosophers, that Men would respect themselves, pay all due Honour to the God within them, and not prostitute and enslave a noble Principle of Reason, so nearly allied to the Divine Spirit above, by the Filthy Affections of Brutes. But, if Our being made in the Likeness of God were a good

good Argument to this Purpose ; how much more persuasive ought that to be, of God's being made in the Likeness of Man ? That is the Ground of a much nearer and more endearing Relation, than ever our Nature could boast of before. And, Shall we dishonour such a Body and Soul, as the Son of God made one with his own Divine Person, by abandoning them to those very

Works of the Devil, which *He was manifested in the Flesh*, on purpose to destroy ?

1 John iii. 8.

To sink That down to the Level of Brutes, which was made but a little lower than the Angels, is an Affront to His distinguishing Bounty, which gave us so honourable a Station, in the Order of his Creatures. But how unpardonable, how monstrous an Indignity is it to Him, who hath in some sort made us higher than the Angels; by condescending to assume Our Nature rather than Theirs ; when we wallow in that Mire and Filthiness, which even the Obscenest of Brutes are detested, and despised, for indulging ? When therefore we reflect upon the Honour God hath done us, let us, at the same time, not forget the Honour, upon this very Account due to our selves. Let us join our Endeavours to exalt the Nature he bore ; Let us cherish a noble and generous Disdain of all manner of Vice, as that which both is, and makes us, despicable. Let us think it our Duty, from our Lord's Humility, to raise our Minds up to that commendable Ambition, of partaking in the Divine Excellencies of Innocence, and Goodness, and Charity ; because he partook of our Frailties and Sufferings, and dwelt in the Similitude of sinful Flesh.

Especially let us remember, what Care the Scripture takes, to observe, that, in the midst of all that Likeness, there was one Difference constantly preserved. For He, that in *all Points was like unto us*, never was, never could, be like us in One Point. Mortal indeed, and tempted too as we are, but *still without Sin*. And therefore He, whose Weaknesses and Tryals are our Security

curity for Compassion and Succour, when we are tempted ; hath never set us any Pattern for yielding to, much less for making, and courting, Temptations.

2. *Secondly*, As our Lord's Incarnation should excite our Zeal, to aspire after all Virtue in general ; so may it more particularly raise our Esteem of Chastity, and Purity. Indulging *the Lusts of Concupiscence* is, by St. *Paul*, made a Mark of *Ment that*

1 Theff. iv. 5.

know not God. But sure they must be errand Strangers to Christ, and the glorious Mystery we have now been treating of, who think his Disciples capable of any Blemish, more contrary, more disgraceful, to their Profession than the abandoning themselves to any sort of Uncleaness. *When he took upon him to deliver Man, he did not abhor the Virgin's Womb* ; But still it was the Virgin's. And that Birth is so far acted over again, in the Person of every Christian ; that, as There only the Holy Ghost then vouchsafed to exert his prolifick Power ; So neither now will he endure to dwell with, or shed his sanctifying Graces upon, any Soul prostituted to filthy Desires. If therefore we would invite this Blessed Guest to visit, to take up his Residence, to set up his Throne, in our Hearts ; we must first purge those Hearts, and fit up an Apartment, agreeable to the Cleanness of the Inhabitant we hope for. So absolutely inconsistent is Impurity of Conversation, with a State of Grace, or the Character of a Christian. So deceitful and empty, so dangerous and deluding, are the most pompous Appearances of Piety and Devotion, or the most boasted Pretensions, to the Spirit ; while Men allow themselves the Liberties, and obey the Affections, and practise and delight in the Works, of the Flesh.

3. Once more. We can hardly, I should think, meditate on the manner of our Lord's Incarnation, with any degree of Seriousness ; and not feel our selves very strongly inclined, to bewail our Unhappiness of Original Sin. That Stain and Guilt are a necessary part of the
wretched

wretched Inheritance, entailed upon all *Adam's* Posterity. And, however some justly valued Privileges may dispose us to entertain lofty Conceits of our selves, yet this single Reflection, methinks, should more than suffice to mortify our Vanity, that we are born the Children of Corruption and Wrath. Highly expedient therefore it is, to apply this Antidote frequently, against that Pride, which, above all others, seems to be the reigning Vice of every Mind. A Vice, dissembled pretty well in many, but really subdued in very few. The First; that puts forth in Infancy, the Last, that forsakes us, through the whole Course of our Lives. And, among many Others, is not This Matter for much Humiliation, that, as valuable Creatures as we fancy our selves, yet it could not consist with the Dignity of the Son of God, to be created, as We are? That He, who submitted to our Infirmities and Sufferings, would not endure the least Tincture of our Defilement; And, though he chose to die like the vilest of Men, yet he absolutely refused to be conceived and born, like the very best of them? How wide a difference is there, betwixt his Thoughts and Ours on this Occasion? The Afflictions, the Sorrows, the Pains, and the Necessity of Dying, which we are apt to look upon as our greatest Miseries, are not, it seems, comparable to That, of which we think so seldom, and so slightly, that we *were shapen in Wickedness, and in Sin our Mothers conceived us*; That we bring into the World that Root of Bitterness, from which our after-Faults, and all our Misfortunes, spring.

This, I say, is Matter of Humiliation and Sorrow; But, blessed be God, it is not however Matter of Despair. For *he hath opened a Fountain for Sin and for Uncleanneſs*. The Waters of Baptism wash our sullied Souls, and present us clean and white before God. These turn our *Scarlet into Snow*, and make our *Crimson Wool*. And though the unhappy Tendencies to Evil remain, and daily Inconveniencies arise from them; Yet we are,

or may be, *daily renewed by the Graces of his Holy Spirit, who was born without Sin to cleanse us from all Sin.* The same sanctifying Power, which came upon the Virgin, will not disdain to descend upon us too; if we imitate Her Meekness and Modesty, her lively Faith and blameless Purity. The same Principle of Fruitfulness, which enabled Her to become a Mother, will Help Us to bring forth abundantly, to conceive and bear Christ in our Hearts, by becoming *fruitful in every good Word and Work.* 'Tis from this Spirit alone, that we are qualified to do so. But, as that Blessing upon Her was a Consequence of her believing and consenting: so Our vigorous Faith, and diligent Concurrence with this Spirit, Our submitting to be acted upon, and influenced by, his Graces, are required, as necessary Conditions to our Sanctification. Let us then put our selves entirely under his Holy Guidance. Let us consider this Miracle, wrought for our Redemption, as a powerful Motive to Innocency and Virtue. And to our constant Endeavours, let us daily (let us at this happy Season especially) add our most fervent Prayers, that, *By the Mystery of his Holy Incarnation, and by his Holy Nativity, our Good Lord would deliver us.* And to these Prayers may he please to say, *Amen.*

The CIRCUMCISION of CHRIST.

The COLLECT.

Almighty God, who madest thy blessed Son * to be Circumcised and Obedient to the Law for Man; Grant us the true Circumcision of the † Spirit, that our Hearts and all our Members being mortified from all worldly and carnal Lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed Will, through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

* Luke ii. 21.
Galat. iv. 4.

† Rom. ii. 29.
Coloss. ii. 11.
iii. 5.

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

Rom. iv. 8.

8. *David*, even while the Law was in full force, describes the Blessedness of the Good Man, not by having no Sin, and paying a perfect Obedience, but by having his Debt released by the Mercy of his Creditor, and the Sins he had committed not being charged to his Account.

8. **B**lessed is the man, to whom the Lord will not impute Sin.

9. Let us see then, What sort of Persons are qualified for this Blessedness: Whether such alone, are the Circumcised, and so live under the Law; or whether others besides them. And for a Resolution of this enquiry, the case of *Abraham* will be of great use to us.

2. Cometh this Blessedness then upon the Circumcision only, or upon the Uncircumcision also? For we say, that Faith was reckoned to *Abraham* for righteousness.

10. Now the Scripture is exprest, that *Abraham* was esteemed Righteous in the sight of God, upon the account, and at the time, of his believing the promise of God made to him. But this, it is plain, was before *Abraham* was Circumcised.

10. How was it then reckoned? when he was in Circumcision, or in Uncircumcision? not in Circumcision, but in Uncircumcision.

11, 12. You will say perhaps, that, upon these Terms, Circumcision was a needless and an useless Imposition. Not so neither. It had its Uses, particularly these two.

11. And he received the sign of Circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith, which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the Father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also:

1. It was a sign of the Faith and Obedience, which was the Righteousness on *Abraham's* part, figured by it. 2. It was a visible testimony and assurance of *Abraham's* being in Covenant with God. A Covenant grounded, not in this rite; but in God's acceptance of that Faith, which was antecedent to this rite. And thus *Abraham* was qualified to be the Father (the common pattern) of all the faithful. Of the Gentiles, or those who were never circumcised, as He had not been himself, when accepted for his Faith; And of the Jews, who are his Children, not by vertue of the mere sign, but by imitation of that Faith and Obedience, signified by it.

12. And the Father of circumcision, to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that Faith of our Father *Abraham*, which he had, being yet uncircumcised.

13. The Law then, which was not yet in being, could not be the foundation of God's promise to *Abraham*, that he should be the common Father of all the blessed Faithful, the Heir of those Privileges and Blesses, which He and They after him should inherit. But that Faith, which was accepted and reckoned to him for Righteousness,

13. For the promise that he should be the Heir of the World, was not to *Abraham*, or to his seed through the Law, but through the righteousness of Faith.

Righteousness, at the time that promise was made; This is the true ground, upon which He then did, and all those of whom he is the reputed Father, must, expect the Benefits, contained, and implied, in that Promise.

14. *For if they which are of the Law be Heirs, Faith is made void, and the Promise made of none effect.*

14. It must be so. For, if we suppose none to partake of this Inheritance, but such only as live un-

der, and acquire a Title to it by, the Law: The consequence will be, 1. That *Abraham's* Faith, (and in proportion that of his Spiritual Descendents) is of no significance at all in this matter: Which yet the Scripture positively declares to have been counted to him for Righteousness. And, 2. That God hath not been so good as his Word. For the Promise was, that he should be a Father of many Nations, his Seed as the Stars of Heaven, and that all Families of the Earth should be blessed in him. Whereas the Law was given but to one Family, not to the whole of his Posterity, even after the Flesh; and so but one Nation is blessed in Him, if all who, like Him, believe without the Law, are, notwithstanding that belief, excluded.

COMMENT.

ST. *Paul's* Intention, in this first part of his Epistle, is to confute those Doctrines; which gave great Disturbance to the first Christians, by urging the necessity of still adhering to the Jewish Law, of depending upon that for Justification and Eternal Life, and consequently excluding the Gentile World, from any Right to, or Part in, these Benefits. In order hereunto he hath proved, from the Authority of their own Scriptures, that Jews, as well as Gentiles, were all under Sin: Therefore, that their Law, and the Works of it, were not sufficient to save them: Therefore there must be some other more powerful Expedient: which, he insists, is Faith: Such as Men might be capable of, notwithstanding they had been Sinners. He proceeds to shew, that this is so far from a novel Conceit, as even to have been the Condition of their great Ancestor's Happiness: That *Abraham* himself, once an Idolater, was esteemed Righteous in Vertue of This, and not for the Merit of his own Doings, or the unspotted Innocence of his Life: That the Wisest and Best Men under

Chap. iii. 9, &c.

Ver. 24, &c.

Chap. iv. 3.

Ver. 6, &c. under the Law, as well as He before it, owed their Happiness to the Mercy of a God remitting their Sins: Consequently, that the Law, if necessary, could only be so, as an indispensable Qualification for such forgiving Mercy; not as it put any into a State, standing in no need of Mercy.

The next thing then to be examined, was, whether God had determined to extend his Favour, to none, who were not thus qualified. And, to resolve this, he appeals to the Manner of his proceeding with *Abraham*. Whose Faith, being counted for Righteousness, before his Circumcision, makes it evident, that the Legal Rites, of which this was the Initiating and the Chief, are not absolutely necessary. This follows from His Case, considered as a private Person. But take him as the common Father of the Faithful, and then it will follow, that every Heir of the same Promise must attain it, by the same Method. And therefore Faith, which *Abraham* had, must be, and the Works of the Law, which he had not, could not be, the Condition, of Men having *Righteousness reckoned to them*. Now *Righteousness*, in this case, is but another Word for Pardon of their Sins, and Salvation of their Souls.

This is in Substance the Apostle's Argument. The Latter part whereof concerning *Abraham*, is very pertinently set before us, on the Day, when that *Promised Seed of his, in whom all the Nations of the Earth are blessed* submitted to be Circumcised; and so made *under the Law, that he might redeem them that were under the Law*. Of which wise and gracious Condescension, that we may have the clearer Understanding, and learn our own Privilege and Duty consequent thereupon: Three Things there are, fit for us to consider.

I. *First*, The Nature and Reasons of the Ordinance it self.

II. *Secondly*, What it represented, as necessary, not only to the Persons obliged to it formerly; but even to Us, who have the Happiness of being exempted from it. And

III. *Thirdly*, The Reasons, that made it convenient for Christ to submit to it.

The Two Former shall make the Subject of my present Discourse. The Last will be more properly reserved, for the Gospel appointed us upon this Festival; and All together, improved as they ought to be, will be the best Celebration of it, that we are capable of.

I. *First* then, We will enquire briefly into the Nature and Reasons of this Ordinance it self. What the Original of it was, as to *Abraham* and his Posterity, the first Morning Lesson gives a Gen. xvii. large and very particular Account. As also, upon what Persons, at what time, and upon what part of the Body, it was to be performed: The necessity and benefit of punctually observing, the great Danger and Punishment of refusing, or neglecting, it. And therefore, waving any needless enlargement upon Particulars so very well known, I choose rather to apply my self directly to those Reasons, for which principally it seems to have been instituted at first, and enjoined so strictly to that Race, for so many succeeding Generations.

I. One of these, we have little cause to doubt, was, That it might stand for a mark of Distinction, between the Descendents of this Stock, and the rest of Mankind. And this is so considerable, that St. *Chrysostome*, and others, insist upon it, as the main ground of its being imposed upon them. To which purpose we may take notice, that the History informs us, of *Abraham* being, some time before this Command, called away from his Country and Kindred, who were, like the rest of their Neighbours, Idolaters: That, in Obe-

Hom. in Gen.
xxxix, xl.
Maimonides
More Nev.
Gen. xii.

dience to that Call, he made no delay to separate himself, not from their Persons, and Conversation, and Dwelling only, but from their Corrupt Manners, and false Worship too. Into which, to the intent He and His might not at any time afterwards relapse, it was thought a con-

Gen. xxxiv. convenient prevention, and guard for their

Virtue, in process of time, to forbid them promiscuous Marriages, and (so far as their Circumstances would allow) all manner of civil Commerce, with any of the Heathen People round about them. This may satisfy us, why *Circumcision*, as our Saviour speaks, should

John v. have been *of the Fathers, and not of the Law*: because God had, even then, begun to make

such a Separation, and selected to himself a peculiar People, some Hundreds of Years before the giving of the Law at Mount *Sinai*. This also may be a good reason for

the Inferences, made by some Names of great Authority, upon what we read in the Book of *Joshua*: That, during the *Israelites* Forty Years sojourning in the Wilder-

ness, there was an intermission of this Rite, but, that it was immediately repeated again, upon their entrance into the Land of *Canaan*. The Persons, on whom it had passed in *Egypt*, were dead in that long Pilgrimage; and They, who were born in the mean while, had not yet undergone it. Not improbably, because the Ground of it thus far ceased, while they were by themselves in a desolate place. But, so soon as they returned into a Land inhabited, a Country scandalous for all manner of abominable Wickedness, when the danger of mingling with Men of different Persuasions, and of being seduced by such mixture, returned, it was requisite, this Note of Union among themselves, and of distinction from Foreigners, should return with it. In the Observance of which this People were afterwards so exceedingly rigid, and tenacious, as to render it the Character of Civil, no less than Religious, Communion. The Privileges of Commerce

merce and Friendship, and even freedom of Conversation, being usually imparted to Aliens, as we find them to the *Sichemites* in particular, with an *Only in this will we consent unto you, if ye will be, as we be, that every Male of you be Circumcised.* Gen. xxxiv. 15.

2. *Secondly*, This was also a Note of Commemoration, to put them that bore it continually in mind; whose Offspring they were, and what advantages they stood entitled to, provided they took care, not to degenerate from the Glories of that Stock, from whence they sprung. Now, considering that *Abraham* was the First we read of, whom Almighty God rescued from those general Corruptions in Faith and Manners, which the World had now a second time sunk into, by relapsing since the Flood; Considering, that this Person and his Issue were singled out, for a Repository of Truth, a chosen Generation, a Receptacle for God upon Earth, and the Source of his Son after the Flesh; there was reason in abundance, why this Remembrance should be very grateful to them. And apt enough, 'tis plain, upon all occasions they were, to value themselves upon so particular an Honour. The rest of Mankind we find them holding at distance, and in great contempt, branding them with the reproachful Name of *the Uncircumcision*, making great boast of *Abraham's* Seed, and much Account of the Covenant struck with Him. But the most useful part of this Reflection was too commonly overlook'd: The Eminent Faith, and ready Obedience, of so renowned an Ancestor, and the noble Emulation of his Virtues, which such a Pattern ought to have inspired. 'Tis therefore, that a Behaviour, unworthy the Descendents of such a Father, is so often charged upon them; Therefore, that they are reproached with a vain presumption, of their Blood alone recommending them. *Think not*, says the Baptist, *to say within your selves, We have Abraham to our* Matth. iii. 9.

A a 2

Father,

Father, that is, while your selves are no better than Serpents, and a generation of Vipers. And our Blessed Saviour, in like manner, If ye were Abraham's Children, ye would do the works of Abraham. To the same effect it is, that St. Paul here insists, that *Abraham's Faith* moved God, to engage in such liberal Promises to Him, and his Posterity; That the Covenant was a Consequence of his Piety, and Circumcision a Confirmation of that Covenant; And, that the only Relation to Him, which could stand any Man in stead, is not that of Consanguinity and Natural Descent, but the Resemblance of his Virtues, and claiming under him, as Father of the Faithful. These are the things proper for Circumcision to have suggested; And thus it was their Honour and Advantage; A Monument of Favour, which did set that Race above the World in common, and a powerful Incitement to those Qualifications, which distinguished, and capacitated Him for such peculiar Grace.

3. Hence it is sufficiently manifest, in the *Third* place, that Circumcision was a sign of inward Virtue, and intended to figure some particular Dispositions of the Mind, which bore proportion to the outward Ceremony, and were required, for rendring it, effectual. But, because the shewing what These are in particular, hath been already propounded for the Subject of my *Second* General Head; I shall reserve them for that place, and proceed to consider it,

4. *Fourthly*, Not only as a Sign, but a Seal too. For so St. Paul expressly terms it here, *a Seal of the Righteousness of Faith.* Now this is a Term, naturally referring us to mutual Contracts; and accordingly we find it, at the first Institution, stiled *a Covenant*, and a *TOKEN of the Covenant of God in their Flesh.* My Endeavour therefore shall be to explain, in few Words, How fitly it was chosen for that purpose.

What

What it ratified on God's part, and What it implied on Man's.

The Promises of God were to this effect: That he would bless *Abraham*, and his Seed after him, with numerous Increase, and wonderful Successes:

That he would bestow upon them the Land of *Canaan*, admit them into an everlasting Covenant with himself: And that, *in his Seed all the Families of the Earth should be blessed.* Now the commanding Circumcision as a Memorial of this Covenant, was the strongest Confirmation imaginable of these Promises. For this was a Character, hardly to be supposed possible, to grow into use by Men's own choice, or for any other reason, but purely in Obedience to an appointment of God; It did not only distinguish them from, but rendered them despicable in the Eyes of, most other Nations and Professions. And it was a Mark, as indelible, as it was particular. Consequently They, and all the World, must easily discern, whether God were really as Good as his Word, or not. For, by appointing all of that Race to use it for such a purpose, there could be no confusion in after Ages; no dispute who was, or was not, a *Child of Abraham*, and an *Heir according to Promise.* This Ratification every Man carried about in his own Person; And They, who did not, were sufficiently informed of it. Neither the thing, nor the occasion of it, was a Secret; And consequently, neither could the answering, or the disappointing, those Expectations raised by it, be any. So that this Progeny had the firmest grounds of Assurance. For no Man can have greater dependence upon Truth and Justice, than for the Party, with whom he deals, to give such a Pledge of both as must needs betray it self: by raising a Witness in Judgment against him, which cannot fail to publish his Falshood to all the World, if he should happen to be guilty of it.

*Gen. Chap. xii,
xv, xvii.*

Thus did it seal God's part; and the Counterpart on Man's was likewise testified by the same Expedient. For by this They engaged to be his People, to forsake Idolatry, and to Worship and Obey the true God only. Of all which this was a very significant indication, in opposition to those obscene Deities, and bestial Rites, that made up a great part of the Pagan Religion. And to shew that the Signification of the Rite was not confined to the renouncing of false Gods, but extended to the whole of their Duty; it was used, and interpreted afterwards, for the initiating Ceremony into the Obedience of the whole Levitical Institution. Hence it is,

that the Apostles complain of it, as a *Yoke*,
Acts xv. 10. *which neither They nor their Fathers were able to bear.* Not that Circumcision was, or could be

such, singly and by it self; but only upon the account of its Consequences; The long train, and heavy burthen of Ceremonies it drew after it, and the rigour of that

Sentence, which this one Act concluded them under, rendered it such. Hence being
Acts xv. 1, 24. *Circumcised after the manner of Moses, and being Circumcised, and keeping the Law,* are used as Terms e-

quivalent. Hence St. Paul argues against
Gal. v. 2, 3. it so warmly, *Behold I Paul say unto you,*

that if ye be Circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every Man that is Circumcised, that he is a Debtor to do the whole Law.

Circumcision then, to the *Jews* was plainly of the same importance in this respect, with Baptism now to Christians. A Sacrament of Initiation to the Service of God, a Holy Engagement to believe and do, as He had revealed and commanded. The Substance of the thing engaged for, was then indeed sometimes more, and sometimes less; But thus much was common to all times, that it contracted for an Universal Compliance with, and Obedience to, whatever God had made obligatory to the Men of that present time.

And

And the Token of this, in respect of Men, was highly convenient also. They could not evade it, they could not conceal it. The Remembrances of their Duty were always present, and their Law had so deep a Concern in it, that the very Life, and Soul, and Substance of Judaism seems to have consisted in Circumcision. Without this, they were Aliens and Strangers in right, though Children in Blood. The Person undergoing it, was for that Day called the *Spouse*, to intimate his Marriage then to God. This made them *Israelites* in Privilege, and was contrived to make them *Israelites indeed*. Nor were the weighty Constructions put upon it, additional Inventions of Superstitious Men: But God himself designed it for such mutual Stipulations, and accordingly declared to *Abraham* at the very first appointment, *This is my Covenant which ye shall make between me and you, and thy Seed after thee.* And hence, I presume, They argue very reasonably, who have concluded this to be an Expedient, for removing the Guilt of original Sin then, in proportion to what baptism doth now. The Part, on which this Rite is exercised, being probably thought to intimate thus much. But waving that, farther than this short hint, it seems pretty plain from the reason of the thing. For the Nature of Covenants with God is, to put Men's future Fate, upon the Issue of their future Fidelity in performing what they contract for. And therefore all former Quarrels must be taken up, all old Debts cancelled, before Men can be in a condition of indenting afresh with him. A Covenant-State implies Favour, and Friendship, a good Understanding, and a clear Account; Such as forgives, and imputes no past Trespases; unless some subsequent Forfeiture cast the Man back again, and, by repeated Acts of Enmity, raise up the otherwise forgotten Provocations, in Judgment against him.

Gen. xvii. 10.

Much more might be spoken concerning this *First Head*. But I confine my self the rather, because it explains an Ordinance, so far from necessary now, that it is even unlawful and destructive. Yet something there lies couched under it, which hath not yet lost, nor ever can lose, its Obligation. The Collect for this Day hath instructed us to pray for *the true Circumcision of the Spirit*; and therefore my Subject is far from having Justice done it, till diligent attention hath been paid to my

II. *Second Head*. Which promised to consider, what this Rite represented, as necessary, not only to the Persons formerly using it, but to Us also, who have the happiness of being exempted from the Carnal Ordinance it self, and all the Servile Consequences of it.

That a great deal of this kind was always intended, and that Men at no time ought to have rested in the External act alone, is manifest beyond all Controversy, from the Writings of the *Old Testament*. Hence it was,

Deut. x. 16. that *Moses* commanded the *Israelites* to *Circumcise the Foreskin of their Heart*, and be no more stiff-necked. In agreement whereunto

Acts vii. 51. St. *Stephen* calls the obstinate Jews *uncircumcised in Heart and Ears*; and adds the reason of his reproaching them in those terms, *Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost*. Hence is it predicted, as a Blessing of *Israel's* best Days, *The Lord thy*

Deut. xxx. 6. *God will Circumcise thy Heart, and the Heart of thy Seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul*. And though at the first Co-

Gen. xvii. 14. venant with *Abraham*, the threatening ran thus, *The Uncircumcised Man-child, whose Flesh of his Foreskin is not Circumcised, that Soul shall be cut off from his People*: Yet it seems, removing the

Jer. iv. 4. Flesh alone was not Security sufficient. For thus *God* expresses himself by *Jeremiah*, *Circumcise your selves to the Lord, and take away the Fore-*

Foreskin of your Heart, ye Men of Judah and Inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my Fury come forth like Fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of your evil doings. So certain it is, even from this Peoples own Testimonies, which St. Paul in this Epistle hath urged them with upon this Occasion, that *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that Circumcision which is outward in the Flesh: But he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and Circumcision is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men but of God.*

Rom. ii. 28, 29.

The Texts here alledged do plainly evince, that there is an inward Circumcision required: That This is the most material, and most acceptable, the only effectual One. Not only so, but they in great measure describe it to us, and save us the Labour of seeking any farther, for a just Notion of the thing. For, from These put together, it is easy to see the Substance of it comprised, in the *Three* following Particulars.

1. The *First* is, a Readiness, and willing Disposition, to know the Will of God; and to submit to it, when known. This I collect from that Exhortation of *Moses*, *Circumcise the Foreskin of your Heart, and be no more Stiff-necked,* joined with the Deut. x. 16. Reproof of St. *Stephen*, who calls the Acts vii. 51. Jews *uncircumcised in Heart and Ears*, by reason of their inflexible Opposition, to the Doctrine of our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles.

Now Candour, and Ingenuity of Temper, giving our Teachers a patient Hearing, examining what they would persuade us to fairly, without Partiality and Prepossession, allowing every Argument its just Weight, yielding to the Convictions of Truth, so as to assent with our Understanding and Will, and to make what we understand and believe the constant Rule and Measure of our Practice; These are Moral Duties, of eternal and indispensable Obligation. All Professions of Men, all Dis-

penations

penfations of Religion are, and must be, bound under them. Sincerity, and Modesty, and Meekness, ever were, and ever will be, Virtues. Faction and Fierceness, Perverseness and Obduration of Mind against God and his Ministers, always will be Vices. The Former have a Rectitude, the Latter an Obliquity, in their Nature, which cannot be changed. The Foreskin then to be taken away, in this Sense, is All that Prejudice and Self-conceit, all that carnal or worldly Reasoning, which obstructs the Efficacy of Truth upon our Hearts and Lives. For want of this Circumcision, the Jews, who had the Covenant in the Flesh, were yet out of it, as to its real Advantages, and Spiritual Importance. And without the same, the Christian, who disowns and disdains all Marks of Judaism upon his Body, is yet, in Spirit, and to all the Purposes of Sin and Reprobation, an errant Jew still.

2. *Secondly*, This true Circumcision of the Spirit imports the weaning our selves from the World, and settling our Affections upon God and Goodness. Thus much I infer from that other Passage of *Moses*, *The*

Deut. xxx. 6. *Lord thy God shall Circumcise thy Heart, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, with all thy Heart and with all thy Soul.* So that, in

Matth. xxii. 38. this Respect, *the first and great Commandment*, as our Saviour calls it, the Founda-

tion and the Substance, the Beginning and Complement, of the whole Moral Law, was shadowed in, and contained under, this most significant Ordinance. And indeed not improperly: Since the retrenching our Desires, and Enjoyments, in things temporal, is the only Expedient for raising up our Minds, to worthy Ideas

Matth. vi. 24. of things Eternal. For, *God and Mammon cannot dwell together.* Each will engross

the whole Breast to himself; and that *Heart* can never be in Heaven, which is not first persuaded, that its *Treasure*, its best and only Treasure, is there. Covetous-

ness

ness and Injustice, Worldly-mindedness and Vanity, Luxury and Love of Pleasure, Straitness of Hand and Heart, and Unmercifulness to the Poor and Distressed: In a Word, All those corrupt Principles and Dispositions, which argue, that we do not love God, or that we do not love Him better than the World, or that we do not love our Neighbour for His sake, are so many sure Symptoms of an *uncircumcised* Spirit. These then must be pared off, and cast away. And the Pious, the Devout, the Strictly Honest, the cheerfully Liberal, the Tender and Compassionate, the Kind and Condescending Christians, They only are the Seed of *Abraham*, They only Heirs of that Covenant, made to that glorious Father of the Faithful.

3. *Thirdly*, This Circumcision of the Spirit does yet more immediately denote a strict Guard and Government over our selves: Reservedness even in the lawful Pleasures of Sense, and a total Abstinence from, and Abhorrence of, all manner of scandalous Lewdness, and Debauchery in Conversation. Thus much is plain from that of *Jeremiah*, where the *Foreskin of the Jews Heart* is explained by *the Evil of their Doings*. And this again is described in the Chapter next following, by *committing Adultery, assembling by Troops in Harlots Houses, being as fed Horses in the Morning, every one neighing after his Neighbour's Wife*. It is obvious indeed to any, who considers at all what Circumcision was, that the subduing of sensual and lascivious Inclinations must needs have been meant by it. This is the very first Thought, that offers it self, and was no doubt one of the chief Ends designed by it.

No Man then fulfils the Spiritual Intent of that Law now, but the sober, the regular, the chaste, the mortified Christian. He that subdues his Body, and brings it into Subjection; that curbs his Appetites sharply, and keeps a strait Rein over his Passions. And though This, like

like the Circumcision in the Flesh, be painful ; yet done it must be, and that early too. No Man in this Case can begin too soon, because no Man can be in Covenant with God and Christ, upon other Terms. *Our Hearts and all our Members must be mortified from all worldly and carnal Lusts, before we can obey his blessed Will.* So that, as great an Undertaking as this may appear, it is yet in Truth but a Preparation to Goodness ; It is not the whole of our Duty, but the putting us into a Capacity

and readiness for our Duty. *The Superfluity of Naughtiness must be laid apart, before we can receive the engrafted Word with Meekness.* And

Some have supposed a peculiar Elegance, in that Expression of St. James, as alluding to Circumcision in particular. However that be ; The Resemblance is so far good, that God requires Men to part only with Superfluities in both Cases. When he bids us be willing to learn and to believe, he does not command us to be blindly implicit, or foolishly credulous ; but only means, that we should be considerate and just Judges, of True and False, of Good and Evil. When he calls our Affections off from the World, he does not deny us an honest Concern, or a decent Use of it ; but forbids the making This our whole, or principal, Study and Delight. When he denounces War against our Lusts, he does not debar us of necessary Recreations, nor condemn the Pleasures that are moderate and innocent. And thus far every Man is obliged to set Bounds to himself. Every Christian hath indeed done it already, in that Baptism, which the Apostle hath therefore most emphatically stiled,

The Circumcision made without Hands, and putting off the Body of the Sins of the Flesh. This, and nothing less, can make it possible to profit, by Him, who vouchsafed to be *circumcised and obedient to the Law for Man.* The Reasons and Benefits of which Condescension, the Gospel for this Day will, in the Next place, lead me to consider.

In the mean while, If it may become us to suppose One Time fitter than another, for taking Pains with our selves, in order to the acquiring, or cherishing, or perfecting, the good Dispositions I have been pressing; When can the good Work more seasonably be set about, than on this very Day? The Day, that opens, as it were, a fresh Scene of Life, by letting us into a New Year. But well it were, if the Rejoicings usual upon this Account, were mingled with Seriousness and prudent Reflection; such, as might render these Revolutions of Time, Matter of solid and unproveable Joy to us. For surely this would either check our Joy, if the Wickedness of those already spent amiss, and none of the Succeeding, better than the Former, do justly reproach us: Or make us careful, that those yet to come (if any be yet to come) may not have occasion to reproach us any more. When this is taken care of, and Men live, like those that must give an Account; then are these Lengthenings out of Life a Matter of Thanks and Joy, because the more Service we pay, the greater Reward we shall be sure to receive. But let us not mock our selves with these Solemnities; Nor think, because the Sun is now at the Point he was a Twelvemonth since, that We are so too. No, very far from that. The State of our Account is greatly altered, and we are so much nearer being called upon to give it up. How many, even within the narrow Compass of our own Acquaintance, who were then as healthful, as gay, as liberal, as vain in promising themselves many Years, as we perhaps are now, have yet been called to give up Their account already? And were None of these equal to Us, in the Advantages of Age and Strength? Were all Sick, and Old, and Feeble, that They should be taken, and We left? Think with your selves a little; And let that Thought instruct you, whether you ought to depend so very much upon finishing that Year, which you are now beginning. Whether you ought not therefore so to begin it, as to resolve, that it shall

shall be a New Year to you, in the most Christian and beneficial Sense. Surely we owe this to the distinguishing Providence of God, whose *Forbearance, and Long-suffering, and Goodness*, expressed in our *Preservation*, call for the Thanks of living to his Glory. Surely we owe it to our Selves, who else do but inflame our *Reckoning*, and *treasure up to our selves Wrath against the Day of Wrath*; if, as we draw nearer, so we do not take care to be fitter for, Death and Judgment. I conclude therefore with that of the Apostle, *Let the Time past of our Life suffice to have wrought the Will of the Gentiles, when we walked in Lasciviousness, Lusts, Excess of Wine, Revellings, Banquetings, and the like.* But for the Days, which God of his Mercy permits us to see hereafter, Let us (and Lord give us Grace that we may) so *number them, as to apply our Hearts unto Wisdom.* That Wisdom, which, is from above, and seeks those Things that are above, the Things that shall endure, when Weeks, and Months, and Years, shall be no more:

1 Pet. i. 4. Even an *Inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for us.* Of which God in his infinite Mercy, and at his own due time, make us all partakers, for the sake of the Son of his Love, Christ Jesus our Lord: To whom, with the Father, and Holy Spirit, be all Honour and Glory, henceforth and for evermore. *Amen.*

The GOSPEL.

St. Luke. ii. 15.

PARAPHRASE.

15. The Hymn of Praise being ended, the Angels were seen to return up to Heaven, and then the Shepherds invited and encouraged each other, to go see this wonderful thing which they concluded the Angel had, by God's Command, related to them.

15. **A**ND it came to pass, as the Angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us go now even unto *Bethlehem*, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

which they concluded the Angel had, by God's Command, related to them.

Vol. I. *The CIRCUMCISION of CHRIST.* 367

16. *And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.*

17. *And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.*

but published to others the whole matter, and what they told them about this Child.

18. *And all they that heard of it, wondered at those things which were told them by the Shepherds.*

inventing a Lie, the Relation they gave of the thing, with wonder.

19. *But Mary kept all these things, and ponder'd them in her heart.*

comparing them one with another, and observing them all.

20. *And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God, for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.*

the exact Agreement they found, between what the Angel had said.

21. *And when eight Days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his Name was called Jesus, which was so named of the Angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

was named, *Jesus*: Which name was not chosen by his Mother, or *Joseph*, but particularly directed by the Angel, who was sent from God to the Virgin, to foretel, and prepare her for, his Incarnation.

16, 17. Accordingly they came forthwith, and found all things just as the Angel had described.

Whereby they were not only convinced themselves, the Angel had declared to

18. The Condition of these Relators not rendering them suspected of, filled all that heard it

19. His Mother in the mean while contemplated these things silently, how wisely God ordered

20. But the Shepherds went back to their Flocks, full of Thanks to God, and joyful at

21. On the Eighth Day, as the Law appointed, the Child was circumcised; and then, (according to custom) he

COMMENT.

FROM the Consideration of Circumcision in general, for which the Epistle of this Day ministred occasion, I am now brought, by the Gospel, to observe it, as a Rite, which passed upon our Blessed Saviour in particular. But, before we enter upon the points proper to be insisted on, upon that Occasion; it may not be amiss to say, how the Account of this Matter, given us in the Close of this Scripture,

Ver. 21.

proves, that our Lord was actually Circumcised. For the Words, as they stand in our English Translation, might be so interpreted, as only to import our Blessed

Saviour's

Saviour's receiving the Name of *Jesus*, at the same distance of Time from his Birth, which was the usual and appointed Day, for Jewish Children to be circumcised upon: And so, as not necessarily to determine, whether this Name were given him, with that Rite, or without it.

But here it is to be observed, that the Original Language reads a Conjunction, which Ours hath omitted. The Verse then, strictly and literally, runs thus, *When Eight Days were accomplished for the Circumcising of the Child, and his Name was called Jesus, &c.* Which Particle *and* is not perhaps wholly superfluous, as some Criticks and our Translators have esteemed it: But rather very significant, and, by an *Ellipsis*, in which the Greek Tongue is known to abound, implies the Repetition of the foregoing Verb, and may be thus supplied, *When eight Days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, and he was circumcised, his Name was called Jesus.*

Such Brevity is the more excusable, in the present Case, because the thing was abundantly notorious, that the Jews, of that and former Ages, did always name their Children, at the time of Circumcising them; that they never imposed Names solemnly upon Males, but at that Time; and that they durst not do it, without the

Luke i. 59.

Use of Circumcision. Of this the Evangelist had, just before, mentioned a famous Instance, in the Case of *John* the Baptist. Of this, with regard to our Lord, St. *Paul* hath left sufficient Intimation,

Gal. iv. 4.

when declaring him to be *made under the Law*, that is, to have submitted to its Ordinances. Which he did not by any means submit to, if this so very important Ordinance were not performed upon him, in such Time, and Manner, as the Law directs.

Thus much being premised, to shew what Reason we have, even from the Text before us, to satisfy our selves, that our Lord was really circumcised: I now apply my self to observe from hence,

I. *First,*

I. *First*, The Reasons, for which it was convenient he should be so.

II. *Secondly*, the Importance of the Name given to him when he was so: and

III. *Thirdly*, The Time, when both these things were done.

I. Under my *First* head, which assigns the Reasons, why it was convenient for our Blessed Lord to be Circumcised, I might enlarge on great Variety. But it will be sufficient to insist on those, which seem to be the Principal; and such as are nearest allied to those uses, attributed, in my last Discourse, to Circumcision in general.

I. Look upon This then, *First*, as a Mark of Distinction, and thus it became *Jesus* to be Circumcised, that he might qualify himself the better, for Acceptance and free Conversation with the *Jews*. The very mingling with Men that were otherwise, was esteemed a Pollution. And accordingly we find St. *Peter*, when coming to *Cornelius* and his Company, making this Apology for himself, *Ye know*

Acts x. 28.

that it is an unlawful thing, for a Man that is a Jew, to keep company, or come unto one of another Nation; but God hath shewed me, that I should not call any Man common or unclean. Now, that this uncleanness did not proceed merely from foreignness of Birth, is evident, not only from the constant practice of receiving Persons, of any Nation whatsoever, into all the Rights of Natives, when submitting to this Rite; But also, from the Terms of the Accusation, brought against St. *Peter* upon this Account. For

xi. 2, 3.

They who contended with him, said, Thou wentest into Men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. Reproach, and Scorn, and a haughty Distance, was the Treatment, such Persons had to expect. And therefore *Timothy* was taken and circum-

xvi. 3.

cised by St. Paul, because of the Jews that were in those quarters, to render his Ministry acceptable among them. The Errand then, upon which Christ came to his own Countrymen, had otherwise been absolutely lost; No Audience at all given to it, no Opportunities allowed of Preaching, or Conferring publickly, nay, not even of Eating and Drinking, and insinuating himself in private Conversation. For, had not this Ceremony passed upon him, they would, agreeably to their own Principles, for disregarding it, have shun'd a Man, whose only Business with them was to instruct and convert them to the Truth.

Thus hath our Blessed Master set us all a Pattern, of being well content, to put our selves under some hardships and restraints, which are not necessary upon our own Accounts; when we foresee, that These will help forward the Good of Others, and bring us into a Condition of doing their Souls Service. And even Great things should not be declined, which will gain us access to the Hearts of our Brethren, render our Advice more prevailing, our Company upon Religious Accounts more agreeable, and the wholesome Truths, we labour to instil, better heard, more kindly taken, and consequently more successfully considered. As certainly they will, as oft as any Prejudice, known to lie against the Person attempting to persuade, is first removed out of the way.

2. *Secondly*, As Circumcision was a Commemorative Sign of *Abraham*, and of the Covenant made with Him, so was it likewise highly requisite for Christ to under-

Gal. iii. 16. go it. Of Him was that most Glorious of all Promises to *Abraham* intended, *In*

thy Seed shall all the Nations of the Earth be blessed. Which made it fit the World should have this Testimony also, of his being truly and rightly descended from that Ancestor. The Privileges, granted in that Covenant, made the Patriarch, from whom they were derived

ved down, The Glory and Boast of his Posterity. Now, when the Mediator of a better Covenant came, the Former however was to recede with Honour; And, that it might do so, his own Example approved a Sacrament of his Father's Institution, by taking it upon his own Person. So certifying, that This, as things then stood, was the proper Method of recommending Men to the Favour and Blessing of God, and the Rights of the Covenant-State.

So many, and indeed fundry more, Circumstances concur, to render the Circumcision of Christ reasonable: as an addition of Honour to the Ordinance of God, and a firmer Establishment of Their Minds, who, though about to be released from it, yet came over to the Faith, from a Profession, which had subjected them to, and taught them to depend upon the use of it, as a Proof of the Truth of God, and a Confirmation of the Benefits, originally indented for, with the Father of the Blessed Seed.

But that's not all. The Evidence of his being the Son of *Abraham*, even in a larger and looser Sense was necessary: I mean, the making it appear, that he was Very Man. For, as the Race of which he came, must be made clear to the *Jews*, who were long ago warned to expect a Messiah of the Seed of *Abraham*, the Tribe of *Judah*, and the House and Lineage of *David*; So must the Substance of his Human Nature, to silence the Perverseness of some antient Hereticks, who will not allow him of any Line at all. These Men (so wild and extravagant is Error) contended, that the Word of God appeared only as Man, and, in that Form taught and did Miracles. Now this Opinion, one would think abundantly prevented, it is at least sufficiently confuted, by the single act we are upon. For that could never be performed upon an empty Form. Flesh and Blood only, was in condition to be wounded by a Knife; a Shadow could neither bleed,

nor be cut away; And this proves the Reality of his Human Body.

But still this particular Proof of it was not equally necessary to All, because all did not stand obliged to this Ceremony. Many other Actions and Sufferings of his Life argued the Truth of his Humanity, and therefore This had a farther end. For, the choosing this Method, and submitting to Circumcision, at a regular time, and as a Religious Rite, was a proof of his Consanguinity to that Generation of Men, who made this a solemn part of their Worship. Any cutting and bleeding would have proved him the Son of Man, but this cutting and bleeding only could have any force for proving him the Son of that Man, of whose Seed the Christ was promised to come.

3. *Thirdly*, As Circumcision was a Seal of a mutual Covenant, in this respect also it was expedient for Christ to be Circumcised. Not upon his own personal Account indeed; but for the sake of Others, whose Persons he came to represent, and whose Cause he undertook. Thus much we acknowledge, in the Collect for this Festival, when saying, that *Almighty God made his blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the Law for Man*. He had no Sin of his own to be done away; but, by doing the same Penance with those that had, he declared the Efficacy of this Ordinance, to all the Faithful, who then applied it for that purpose. As God, he was superiour to, and could not be bound by, this his own Law: But the Figure now to be made, was that of a Man; And, as such, he was born within the limits where it obtained, and subjected himself to the voluntary observance of it.

Again. That whole Law, so far forth as it was a carnal Commandment, he came to abolish; but before its Abolition it must be fulfilled. And, because this never had been, never could be, done strictly and punctually by any Other, he did it in the behalf of Them,
who

who failed in the performance. The Sentence of the Curse continued in full force, till some Person appeared, on whom it could take no hold. And therefore, by this initiating Ceremony, he contracted for a perfect Obedience; and He, of all that had contracted, was the single Person, that made his Engagement good. Thus, getting above the Law, he supplied the Defects of his Brethren; and, in virtue of his own unblemished Righteousness, introduced a gentler and more practicable Condition, by exchanging the Righteousness of Works, for that of Faith. So St. Paul, *Now I say that Jesus Christ was a Minister of the Circum-* Rom. xv. 8.
cision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the Fathers. Upon which Words St. Chrysostom hath the following Reflection, very apposite to the Subject we are handling.

“ The Promise was made to *Abraham*, but all his
“ Progeny rendred themselves obnoxious to Punishment.
“ For the Transgression of the Law brought Wrath up-
“ on them, and overthrew all claim to the Promise of
“ the Fathers. The Son therefore came, and com-
“ pounded the Matter with the Father; so as that
“ those Promises should be made good; and obtain
“ their intended effect. For he, by fulfilling the whole
“ Law, and particularly Circumcision, did both by
“ this, and by his Cross, deliver from the Curse, conse-
“ quent upon the Transgression, and so kept the Pro-
“ mise from falling to the ground. The Apostle there-
“ fore, when styling him the *Minister of Circumcision*,
“ means thus much. That he, by coming and fulfil-
“ ling the whole Law, by being Circumcised, and the
“ Seed of *Abraham*, took off the Curse, appeased the
“ Wrath of God, and rendred them, who were thus
“ delivered from their Offences, capable of receiving
“ the Promise for the future. Thus he turns the Ar-
“ gument back upon Them, who urge the Circumcision
“ of Christ, and his observance of the Law, to prove,

“ that it ought to continue, and must still oblige. For
 “ in effect he reasons thus. All this was done, not that the
 “ Law might stand, but that he might take it away;
 “ deliver thee from the Curse then hanging over thee,
 “ and from thenceforth set thee perfectly at large from
 “ its Dominion. Thy having transgressed and fallen
 “ short of the Law, was the reason why He fulfilled it.
 “ But this he did, not with an intent, that Thou should’st
 “ fulfil it after him; but that he might secure to thee
 “ the Promises made to the Fathers, which the Law had
 “ defeated, by convicting thee of Sin, and proving thee
 “ unworthy of the Inheritance. So that Thou also, O
 “ Jew, art saved through Grace; for thy Condition too
 “ was lost without it. So this admirable Interpreter.

Thus the Son of God submitted, in great Humility,
 to the same mortifying Remedies with common Men;
 And his Goodness was content to suffer that, upon the
 account of Others, which was in no degree necessary up-
 on his own. He hath asserted our Liberty by this volun-
 tary Bondage, and, by bearing a Yoke, much too heavy
 for any Neck but His, hath taken it effectually off from
 Ours. Thus did he begin to save us, as soon as he was
 born; and shed the first Fruits of his Blood for Men, im-
 mediately after his receiving it. So truly was He our
Jesus, so well deserving that name, who became such,
 from the very Moment of his being called so. The
 Reason and Importance whereof is my

II. *Second Head.* *His name was called Jesus*, says the
 Text, and *so named he was of the Angel, before he was*
conceived in the Womb. We read but of few Instances in
 Scripture, where Men had Names determined for them,
 by particular appointment from Heaven, and before the
 time of their Birth. And, as such Names appear to have
 been very significant; so the Persons, distinguished by
 them, were always remarkable for some very extraordi-
 nary Qualities, or Events, which their respective Names
 were

were * designed to denote. This Observation was in no Case made good so conspicuously, as in that now before us. Our Lord's Name is indeed, in Sense and Substance, the same with *Joshua*: That famous Leader heretofore, who, after the Death of *Moses* settled the Israelites in their promised Land, and subdued their Enemies, who opposed their Entrance into it. But, as that Earthly was a Figure of the Heavenly, *Canaan*, so was the Captain of That, an eminent Type of the Captain of Our, Salvation. And if He was worthy to be called a Saviour, much more is this Jesus what his Name imports. For He delivers from the heaviest of all Bondages, from the most formidable of all Enemies; As He, and He only it is, who *saves his People from their Sins*.

To understand, and value as we ought, the Greatness of this Salvation, we must be sensible of the Greatness of our Danger and Misery without it. And this we may quickly be, by a short Recollection of the dismal Consequences of Sin unpardoned, and unconquered.

By This then Men offend against a righteous Law, they go against their Interest and their Duty, they provoke a Holy and a Just God, they contract a deep Guilt, wound their own Consciences, stir up the Wrath of an Avenger, whose Power enables him, and whose Truth obliges him, to punish their Disobedience, with inexpressible and everlasting Torments, both of Body and Soul. By Sin they defile their Nature, and debauch their Principles, bring themselves under the Tyranny of their unruly Passions, and vicious Habits; And, as every Act of this kind repeated adds to their Guilt, so does it bind them faster in their Slavery, put it more out of their Power to shake off their Chains, and heap up a greater Portion of Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God.

* Solomon.
1 Chron. xxii.
9, 10.
Jofiah.
1 King. xiii. 2.
Cyrus.
Isa. xiv. 1, 4.
John Baptist.
Luke i. 13, 17.

Now all these dreadful Consequences our Blessed Saviour did, and He alone could, deliver us from. The Guilt and Stain of our Sins he washed away by his Blood; The Punishment due to them he released, by becoming our Sacrifice, and suffering in our stead: The Anger of God he hath thus appeased, and reconciled us to his once displeased Father: The Power of Sin he subdues by his Grace; by the Doctrines of his Gospel enlightning, by the Assistance of his Spirit strengthening and influencing our Minds, by all those Means and wise Methods, in short, which were necessary for our Condition. By all indeed, that are proper for it; All, that our weak and wretched Circumstances wanted, who are but Men, frail, corrupt, sinful Creatures; All, that our Circumstances would bear, remembring, that we still are Men, free and rational Creatures.

For, as it was before, in *Israel's* temporal Deliverance, that, though effected by the Conduct of *Joshua*, and the wonderful Blessing of God upon his Undertakings, yet had the People too Their Part in it, and, by obeying his Orders, and fighting their own Battles, were instrumental in their own Deliverance: So is it here. This *Jesus* is our Leader, he leads us out to War, he issues out his Orders, and assigns to us our respective Posts. And it is Our part to follow, to obey, to fight under him: to watch and guard against the common Foe; to use the Weapons he puts into our Hands: and so to work out our own Salvation. He hath done all that for us, which we could not do for our selves, but what we can do, is still left upon our Hands. Yet so left, that, provided We be willing, He will make us able to do it. In One Word, He saves his People from their Sins; But still they are *his People* whom he saves. Them that believe his Word, obey his Precepts, devote themselves to his Service, and desire and endeavour, so far as in them lies, to save themselves from them. Less than this had he done, he had not filled the Importance of his Name; and

and more had defeated the Design of it. For, to save those from Punishment, who are still fond of the Guilt, had not been to take away, but rather to promote, the Dominion, and encourage the Practice, of Sin. A Design, unworthy of God, unprofitable to Man, and by no means agreeable to the Tenour of his Gospel, to the Nature of a Covenant in general, or to the glorious Privileges, set forth in that most Blessed Name of *Jesus*. He would but half have saved us, had he not provided for our Holiness here, as well as our Happiness hereafter; and made the One, as attainable, so necessary too, in order to the Other. And hence it is, that the Temper of this Salvation is represented to us, in that Propheetick Song of *Zacharias*; by *being delivered from our Enemies, that we might serve him without Fear, in Holiness and Righteousness before him all the Days of our Life.* Luke i. 74, 75.

Certain it is, That this adorable-Name is a Name of Peace and Love, of Comfort and Joy, to All, on whom the Power of it takes place. But, in regard All are not *Israel* that are of *Israel*; Nor every one, who calls himself a Christian, an actual Partaker of the Blessings of God in Christ: It will concern us all, to see and know, whether the Mercies implied in this Name; have had their proper Effect and Influence upon us. If then the Covetous Man be not saved from his Avarice and Hard-heartedness; Nor the Drunkard from his Riot and Revelling; nor the Lascivious and Unclean from his Lewdness; Nor the Peevish from his Spirit of Contention; Nor the Revengeful from his Malice; Nor the Proud from Vanity and Ambition; Nor the Profuse from his unprofitable Extravagance; Nor the Prophane from his Reproaches and Contempt of Religion; to be short, If Men continue in Sins unrepented of; If they love and like the Fault, how much soever they abhor and dread the Shame, or the Punishment; If they encourage, entice, persuade, harden others in Sin, by their Discourse,

or

or by their Examples; To every such Man our Blessed Lord is no *Jesus* at all, nor does there any one of the innumerable Benefits, implied in that charming Word, belong to him. But to the penitent Sinner, to the devout Worshipper, to the just and honest Dealer, to the bountiful Alms-giver, to the sober and the pure, to the meek and the peaceable, to the humble and the mortified Christian; to the diligent Worker out of his own, and the zealous Promoter of other Men's Salvation; The Safety and Defence, the Support and the Joy, of a *Jesus*, to Them is unconceivable. Because they feel already his powerful Operation on their Hearts; They know, that Temptations cannot hurt, where He shields; nor Sins condemn, where he pardons; Nor Adversity oppresses, where He sustains; Nor Death or Devils drive to Despair, where He, who is the Resurrection and the Life, hath given the Pledges of his Love, and Earnests of Life, Everlasting. Let us then labour, and let us pray, with all our Might, that it may never be our Condemnation, to perish in the midst of Succours; to refuse and neglect a Salvation, which courts us to accept it; to defeat all that hath been done for us; to take a Name into our Mouths, of such Heavenly Importance in it self, yet of no Significance to Us. But do Thou, Blessed *Jesus*, help Us to answer Ours, as Thou hast, and always wilt answer Thy, Character; that we may be thy Redeemed, thy People, thy Saved from our Sins; and Thou our Refuge and Trust, our Hope and our Joy, our All that we can have or hope for; to all Intents our *Jesus*. In every trying Circumstance, in every sorrowful Hour, in the Temptations of Youth, in the Decays of Age, in the Languishings of Sickness, in the Agonies of Death, and in the Terrors of Judgment: In these we are undone without thee, from these none can save us besides thee, and from them all, we know, thou canst, thou wilt save us, if thou do but in Mercy begin the good Work at present in our Hearts, and save us from our Sins.

III. It remains now, in the *Last* place, that I speak to the particular Time, both of circumcising, and naming our Lord, said here to be, *when Eight Days were accomplished*. Of which very briefly.

By *Eight Days being accomplished*, is certainly intended the Eighth Day being come. Of which, as we have other Passages of like Importance, so have we the Direction of the Law, to assure us. The parallel Places may satisfy us, That *on the Eighth Day, after Eight Days, and Eight Days accomplished*, are Terms exactly equivalent. The Letter of the Law is express, in limiting the Time for this Ceremony; not allowing it sooner; not forgiving the Omission of it longer. And much surely need not be said, to persuade your Belief of the Law being in this Case punctually observed in all its Circumstances, by Him, whose Compliance with the Substance was an Act of free Choice, and who intended to leave no part undone, which was required of Them, whom he came to release from it.

The Reasons of fixing this precise Time Learned Men have been much divided about. But, among their several Conjectures, (for they are no better) not any seems more probable, than that, which ascribes it to taking the first Opportunity, after a new-born Child could be supposed capable of enduring so painful an Operation, and, before the Parents Affection was too strong, to expose his Offspring to the Anguish of it. And all this seems likewise to agree very well with a Custom, almost universal in the World, of devoting Infants, of every Country and Persuasion, very early to the Service, and commending them to the Protection, of the Deity they worshipped. Of which, to mention no more, the *offering Sons and Daughters unto Devils*, and making Children *pass through the Fire*, so giving them *to Moloch*, are famous Instances, upon Record in Scripture.

Matth. xvi. 21.

Mark x. 31.

Matth. xxvii.

63.

xxviii. 1.

John xix. 31,

42.

xx. 1.

Acts ii. 1, 15.

Gen. xvii.

Levit. xii.

Psal. cvi. 37.

Levit. xviii. 21.

xx. 2.

As evident it is, that, not only with the *Jews* in Circumcision, but with other Nations, at the Performance of the Ceremonies last observed, a particular Name was imposed. Not only as a distinguishing Character for Civil Convenience, but especially upon a Religious Account; that the Fellow-Professors might know their new Profelytes, and that the Party himself, by this constant Memorial, might be continually reminded of, and quickned in, the Engagements entred into, at the solemn receiving of It.

I ought to add also, That, as our Lord's own Name had, so the generality of pious and sober Persons have always thought it decent, that the Names imposed upon these Occasions should have, somewhat significant in them. Whence, among Christians, it hath grown into a very Commendable Custom, to make choice of those Names, which, either Scripture, or undoubted History, hath assured us, had the Honour to be borne, by Men and Women of Conspicuous Piety and Virtue. That so these Examples might inspire a noble Emulation of their good Qualities, and Actions; or else reproach us, if we degenerate from the Patterns of those bright Saints, whose Lives and Deaths stamped such a Value on their Memory, as to transmit their Names to, and make them coveted by, Posterity.

The only Use, I desire to improve this Head to at present, is, to applaud, and earnestly to recommend the Care, of dedicating our Children to our Lord and Master, in Holy Baptism, with the First Convenience of doing it. The Benefits of this Practice are more than can, The objections against it weaker than need, be insisted on. Let it suffice to say, That Circumcision was as much a Covenant heretofore, as Baptism is now: That, what God then expressly ordained for Them, he cannot be supposed to disapprove with Us. For, Is he the God of the Infants of the *Jews*, and is he not so, of the Christians? Can this be thought so much a better and

and more gracious Covenant, supposing it to exclude so many Millions of Souls, which the Former readily received, nay, peremptorily demanded? And, is it not enough, that These are not positively refused, to satisfy us, that, though the Ordinance be changed, yet the Subjects and Privileges of it continue still the same? Why then do any of us undertake, to make the Gate yet straiter, to shut the up Mercies, and lessen the Family of God? Why represent the Blessed *Jesus* less kind, than *Moses*? No, let us rather lose no Moment's Time, of impressing upon our Offspring the Marks of the New Covenant. Let us make the best Reparation we can, for the Stain and Guilt we convey to them, by seeing this immediately washed off, in *that Fountain opened by Jesus Christ, for Sin and for Uncleaness*; even the Laver of Regeneration, the Sacrament of Baptism. Let us deliver them up to His Care, who is gracious to all Ages, and cannot but embrace, and adopt, the tender Innocence of Those, who are propounded as a Pattern, for all that enter into his Kingdom. And are Those, to whom all that enter in must be like, not capable of entering in themselves? This happy Prevention will be their Security, against the Power of the Enemy, and the Seducements of a crooked and perverse Generation. And He, who shed his first Blood at *Eight Days* old, will know and save Them, who begin to be His, at the same Age. But withal, let it be our constant Business, to second and confirm these good Beginnings, by timely Instruction, and a virtuous Education. For dreadful will Their condemnation be, whose own Bowels shall rise up against them in the Day of Judgment; and upbraid that cruel Fondness, which laid the Foundation of their Vices, and their Torments. But blessed are those pious Souls, who increase the Kingdom of God, with every Addition to their own Family; who double every Joy of Heaven to themselves, by those of the Children, which they have led, or sent before them thither; by a Race of good Men
here,

here, and of glorified Saints hereafter. Which, that we may all be, God of his infinite Mercy grant, for the sake of his Dear Son Christ Jesus, our Blessed Saviour and only Redeemer: To whom be Glory for ever. *Amen.*

The Epiphany; or the Manifestation of CHRIST to the Gentiles.

THE COLLECT.

Matth. ii. 2,
9, 10.

O God, who by the leading of a Star didst manifest thy only begotten Son to the Gentiles; Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by Faith, may after this Life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

Ephes. iii. 1.

1. Since therefore God hath been graciously pleased to unite Jews and Gentiles into one mystical Body (see Chap. ii.) I, who have suffered so many Persecutions, and am now under Imprisonment at Rome, for asserting the Privileges of the Gentile Converts to the Faith, beseech you to walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith ye are called. (Chap. iv. 1.)

1. **F**OR this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.

2, 3, 4, 5. For sure ye cannot but know, how God hath commissioned me to be your Preacher and Apostle; and that God, by special Revelation, declared to me that secret Purpose (of which I have spoken briefly in the two Chapters foregoing) which they who

2. If ye have heard of the dispensation of the Grace of God, which is given me to you-ward.

3. How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery, (as I wrote afore in few Words.

4. Whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.)

5. Which in other ages was not made known unto the Sons of Men, as it is now made known unto his Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit.

lived heretofore had not the like distinct knowledge of, as is now by the Holy Ghost imparted to the Ministers of the Gospel. (For the calling of the Gentiles, though predicted under the Old Testament, yet was not, as to all the Terms and Methods, and Privileges of it, understood as now it is.)

6. That purpose of God I mean, concerning the Gentiles being received into all the Privileges of

6. That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.

the Gospel, (not as they that were Profelytes to the Jewish Church had used to be, but) in all points upon equal advantage with the Jews, and this too without any obligation of submitting to their Law,

7. Whereof

7. *Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me, by the effectual working of his power.*

great Goodness to make use of Me as an Instrument, and to certify his choice and approbation of me, by Miracles confirming the Doctrine I preach.

8. *Unto me who am less than the least of all Saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ:*

9. *And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.*

of Trusts; to bring the glad Tidings to the Gentiles, of the inestimable benefits of the Gospel, and the wonderful goodness of Christ, in knitting all Nations together in one Body, which hath been God's design all along, who thus both made the Material, and new made the Spiritual World, by Jesus Christ.

10. *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God.*

11. *According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

ven, Men and Angels; Those Spirits above, or, (as others) the Heathen Powers, and Princes, and Magistrates of this World, for so ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἐξουσίαι are used Luke xii. 11. and Tit. iii. 1.) The several Methods, and Dispensations in every Age, being now manifestly seen to conspire, in accomplishing that purpose of God from all Eternity, of saving all Mankind by Jesus Christ our Lord.

12. *In whom we have boldness and access, with confidence, by the faith of him.*

our hopes too. For the believing and trusting in him, as our Saviour, this, and this only, does procure us admittance to God, and qualify us to come freely, as resting upon, and being well assured of, his Love and Favour upon this account.

7. And, in order to the making known and bringing about this purpose, it hath pleased God in his

8, 9. Not that I suppose my self to have any Merit or Abilities superiour to others. Quite otherwise. But it hath pleased God to commit to me, the meanest of Christians, that greatest

of the inestimable benefits of Christ, in knitting all Nations together in one Body, which hath been God's design all along, who thus both made the Material, and new made the Spiritual World, by Jesus Christ.

10, 11. Thus, by the gathering of such a Church Universal, that intricate and wonderful Wisdom of God will appear to all the World, Earth and Hea-

ven, Men and Angels; Those Spirits above, or, (as others) the Heathen Powers, and Princes, and Magistrates of this World, for so ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἐξουσίαι are used Luke xii. 11. and Tit. iii. 1.) The several Methods, and Dispensations in every Age, being now manifestly seen to conspire, in accomplishing that purpose of God from all Eternity, of saving all Mankind by Jesus Christ our Lord.

12. And, as all God's dealings with Men center in Him, so do all

COMMENT.

THAT this Festival was always had in great Veneration, is evident from the Writings of the Fathers, and the constant practice of all Ages in the Christian Church. How deservedly it was so, appears from the mighty Blessings, commemorated by it: The Manifestation of our Lord and Saviour, not only to the Wise Men, who

who came from the East to worship him; but to all those, of whom They were the Figures and Fore-runners, the whole Gentile World. Thus was the Mercy accomplished, which in Them had been begun. Thus is the Solemnity of our Lord's Birth closed with Thanksgivings, for a Benefit, which finished, and gave effect to, all we have already praised him for. For, to how little purpose had Light come into the World, if the World had not been directed to, and made partakers of, that Light? Most just therefore are the Solemnities of this Day, Most fitly do they follow those of our Lord's Incarnation, which celebrate a Discovery so happy; that, without it, that very Incarnation, an act of Grace, how Glorious and Wonderful soever in it self, had yet been no Blessing to Us.

It was a farther Accession to the Honour of this Day, that the Holy *Jesus* is supposed to have been, upon it, baptized in the River *Jordan* by *John*. Which *St. Chrysostom* mentions, not only as a thing notorious in his time, but as a principal Cause of the Respects paid to it by the Church. To which let me add an ancient Tradition, that, upon this Day also, our Saviour is supposed to have given the first proof of his Divine Power, by turning Water into Wine, at the Marriage in *Cana of Galilee*.

Upon so many Accounts, hath this Festival been thought to challenge our more than ordinary Regard. The Memory of the Two latter continues still to be, in some measure, preserved and acknowledged, by the Second Lessons appointed for Morning and Evening Service. But the Two former, as more important in themselves and their Consequences, and more nearly concerning Us, are chiefly recommended to our Observation. Of These, the Gospel propounds to Us the Case of the Wisemen; The Epistle, that of the Gentiles at large. This I am now therefore to enter upon; And it does not appear to me

Tom. v. Serm.
74. Ed. Eten.

Luke iii.
John ii.

me, what better or more seasonable improvement can be made of it, than by considering the matter at large; and by endeavouring to represent, as briefly and plainly as I can,

I. *First*. The miserable Condition of Mankind, as it was before, and must for ever have continued, without the Coming of our Blessed Saviour.

II. *Secondly*. The Happy Change, effected by his coming, and the Manifestation of him to the World. From whence will naturally and manifestly follow a

III. *Third* Consideration, concerning the Influence and good Effect, which the Two Heads foregoing ought to have upon us.

I. The *First* thing that offers it self to us, is the miserable Condition of Mankind, as it was before, and would for ever have continued, without the Coming and Manifestation of a Saviour. Of This the Scriptures try to make Us sensible, by great variety of Representations. All of them very Pertinent, all very Melancholy and Moving: But, to make as short work as I can, I will confine my self to One; than which, as none is more familiar and frequent, so none can be more suitable and proper; for indeed it Comprehends, and implies all the rest, under the Name of *Darkness*.

Thus the Ignorance of the Heathens is emphatically called **Darkness*; their Vices, The † *Works of Darkness*; Their Superstition and Idolatry, the ‡ *Kingdom of Darkness*; The Objects of their false Worship, *Rulers* **of Darkness*; and the Persons under the Tyranny of these Abominations, are said to *walk* † *in Darkness*, to *sit and abide in Darkness*, to *love Darkness*, to *be of the Night and of Darkness*, nay, even to *be Darkness it self*.

By comparing these Expressions, we may soon be convinced, that the Holy Ghost designed to signify

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.
vi. 11.
† 1 John ii. 8.
‡ Rom. xiii. 12.
Ephes. v. 11.
† Rev. xvi. 10.
* Ephes. vi. 12.
† 1 John i. 6.
ii. 11.
Luke i. 79.
John xii. 46.
iii. 19.
1 Thes. v. 5.
Ephes. v. 8.

what our own Senses and Experience prove Darkneſs to be. A State of utter Inactivity or perpetual Wandering; A State of Danger and Diſcomfort, of Fears unaccountable, and Terror inſupportable: Of all, that can answer the wretched Condition of Men loſt, and bewildred in the Night, with Snares and Precipices on every ſide them: A State, that robs us of our nobleſt Senſe, diſables or confounds all our Powers of motion, and is that, to which, of all other Calamities, we ſeem to have the moſt natural, the moſt juſt, the moſt unconquerable, Averſion.

How well the Condition of the Gentiles heretofore deſerved this Metaphor; in all its diſmal import as it is not poſſible fully to declare, ſo neither is it of any great conſequence now to underſtand. Except ſo far, as a Senſe of this Miſery may contribute to worthy and thankful apprehenſions of the Goodneſs of God, expreſſed in that happy Change of Affairs, which is reſerved for the Subject of my *Second* Head.

I. Now *Fiſt*. As Darkneſs denotes Ignorance and Error, Theirs, it is evident, was groſs and general; a Darkneſs that might even be felt. To prove this, we need no long Particular, no tragical Enumeration of the Vices, or the Superſtitious, which brought a Scandal upon Human Nature; after a very ſhort deſcription by St. *Paul*, which more than ſuffices for that purpoſe.

For, Who can read the fiſt Chapter to the *Romans*, without Amazement and many mortifying Reflections, to ſee Rational Creatures capable of ſo wretched a Degeneracy; that no Object was ſo deſpicable, as not to be thought worthy of Divine Honours; No Vice ſo deteſtable or brutiſh, as not to obtain, not only in common Converſation, but even in their Rituals of Religion, and moſt Solemn Acts of Worſhip?

Some few great Souls indeed did raiſe themſelves, above the Rubbiſh and Filth of theſe Ruins of Human Nature.

Nature. They lamented, or despised, the Stupidity, or the Credulity, of the Vulgar. But that Knowledge, which discerned the Folly of Others, was not able to attain Wisdom it self. And the effect of it seems to have been perpetual Scepticism; A floating between all Opinions and Principles, discarding that which was manifestly wrong, but not settling their Minds in that which is good and right. In matters too of moral Good and Evil, though some of the Rules and Reflections they have left us, are at once matter of Wonder, and Reproach, to the many, many Christians, who neglect the Improvement of a much clearer Light; yet even here, they who advanced farthest, stopped a great way short. The Nature and Obliquity of several Vices, The proper ends of Moral Actions in general, The certainty of a future State, The solemn Account to be rendered of all our Actions; These, which now are, or ought to be, the governing Principles of every Christian's behaviour, were what they understood but little of, and consequently could not be greatly influenced by. This produced, both in their Discourses such Uncertainty, and such Monstrous Inconsistence in their Lives, that one can hardly say which is more strange, that they should come so near Truth, or that they should miss of it at last; that their Examples should speak them almost more than Men, in Some Actions; and yet little, if at all, better than Brutes, in Others.

When Matters stood thus, as to Ignorance, and Error, the Metaphor of *Darkness* could not be ill suited, as it implies a State of Danger, and Discomfort, and Fear. The Holy Spirit frequently flies to Bodily Exigencies, and Defects, and Distresses for giving us a more lively Apprehension and tender Concern, in things, that cannot fall under the notice of our Senses. And we deceive our selves infinitely, if we suppose, that any of those Resemblances do, or indeed can, over-strain the Point, by representing things worse than really they

they are. For, how hard soever it may be to persuade Men so, yet certain it is, that Blindness in our bodily Eyes is a Calamity in no degree comparable, to That in the Eyes of our Mind; And that, of all the Instances of Misery, that attend a misguided Understanding, none is so dreadful, none so deplorable, as that of Men being left in the Dark, or led wrong, in Matters relating to God and Religion. Now the Case of these Wanderers in the Night, before the Gospel, was such, as made them sensible of being out of the way, but kept them at a loss how to get into it. The glimmerings of Reason unassisted, except with the help of some antient Traditions, which had been maimed and mangled by often transplanting, sufficed, to discover a mighty depravity in Nature; to fill them with Suspicions and Fears of what might be hereafter; but at the same time that it shewed their danger, it neither taught, nor enabled, them to shun it. And, what can we form to our selves more lamentable, than that Man's mis-giving Circumstances, who feels and languishes under his Disease, but knows not where to seek a Remedy? What more confounding, than a Sense of Guilt, to one destitute of means, either for Pardon, or Amendment? So very fitly may we apply to the then wisest of the Heathen World, those Words of our Saviour upon a different Occasion, *If even the Light that is in thee be Darkness, how great, how very wretched is that Darkness?*

But, praised be the Mercy of our God, who took compassion upon poor lost Sinners, and left them not for ever, to perish in their Misery and Folly. A most comfortable and reviving Account whereof I am now about to set forth, under my *Second* Head, which consists of

II. The Happy Change effected, by the Coming and Manifestation of our Blessed Saviour: Who is therefore

fore called, *the Light of Men, a Light to lighten the Gentiles*; The Gospel is called, *His Marvellous Light*; They that believe and obey it, are said, to *walk in the Light, to love the Light, to be Children of Light*, nay to be *Light*; With sundry other Expressions, that bear exact proportion to the already mentioned Miseries, from which Men were thus delivered; and denote the very Reverse of all they felt, or feared, or had been, before.

The thick Night of Ignorance, and confounding Mists of Error, are now perfectly scattered; and, in their stead, succeeds a clear bright Noonday Sun of Knowledge, and Instruction in the ways of Righteousness, The Precipices and Snares, removed from all, who take care to avoid them, and all the Rocks, on which unwary Souls were wont to split, are laid bare and level'd, and a straight, smooth, certain way to Heaven discovered. So that nothing is now left upon Us, more than to direct our Desires, and Steps, to Happiness and Salvation. Despair and doubtful Fear are quite banished; and cheerful Hope, and a mind at Peace with God and its own self, are the joyful Portion of them who submit to its Guidance. A Light, so diffusive, and withal so strong, that, whereas other former Revelations are compared to those feeble assistances of *Lamps to Mens Feet, Lanterns to their Paths, a Candle shining in a dark place*, and the like: The Gospel and its Divine Author have Their Perfections expressed, by the *Day-Star, the Day-spring from on high, the Day, the Sun of Righteousness; A Sun that rises with healing under his Wings*, and which, like that other Sun in the Firmament, sheds his Rays so far and wide, that the darkest and most distant Corners of the Earth may feel the chearing Influence, and *there is nothing hid from the heat thereof*.

John i. 4.
 Luke ii. 32.
 1 Pet. ii. 9.
 John xii. 36.
 1 John i. 7.
 Ephes. v. 8.

Psal. cxix.

2 Pet. i. 19.
 Luke i. 79.
 1 Thess. v. 6.
 Malac. iv. 2.

How these so forcible Metaphors are justified, it may become us (on this Day especially) to observe, by descending to Particulars, answerable to the several Branches of that Misery, wherein the Darknes of former Ages hath already been shewn to consist.

1. As *First*. For Ignorance and Error. This, with regard to the Heathens vicious Lives, was dispersed, by that abhorrence of Evil, and severe Purity of Heart and Life, enjoined in the Gospel. Which presses all those chaste and virtuous Affections, that tend to the *possessing our Vessels in Sanctification and Honour*. All that watchful care, and strict guard over our selves which may subdue the sensual Appetite, preserve the Obedience of the Flesh to the Spirit, and keep Body and Spirit both, in constant resignation to the Will of God : All that Meekness and Modesty, that Justice and Charity, which secure our Duty to Others, and cut off the Pride and Covetousness, the Envy and Ambition, and every other unruly Lust, whereby Society suffers, whereby Humanity and good Nature is checked and disused to Men in general, or those mutual Duties are neglected, which arise from the different Relations and Capacities of Men in particular.

The old Idolatry and Superstition is quite extirpated, by giving Men rational, and consistent, and worthy Notions of God. In so much, that all those Difficulties vanish, in which the Wisest heretofore were entangled, concerning, the Nature, the Providence, the Power, the Justice and Wisdom of God ; the Origin and Government of the World ; the Immortality of the Soul ; the State and Judgment after Death ; the Principles of Moral Actions ; the Ends to which they ought to be directed ; And the Deductions of particular Duties from general Rules. These things are all, so fairly represented, so fully and distinctly laid down, in the Doctrine of *Jesus Christ*, that what before was hid from the most Prudent and Expert, is now revealed to Babes.

The

The Men of mean Condition, and slender Attainments, may learn and improve here. And what some nice conceited People would have us believe to be still wanting, is not a matter of true Religion, and sober Virtue, but of unprofitable Speculation, and wanton Curiosity.

2. Then for the jealous Fears, and sad Discomforts of Darkness, This Gospel is truly Light, with regard to the Covenant of Grace established by it. A Covenant, that proclaims Satisfaction already made, and Pardon to be obtained, for the Chief of Sinners: that allows for Failings, strengthens and helps human Infirmities, changes Men from Enemies and Aliens, to Friends and Children; makes the Bad Good, and assists the Good to grow every Day Better. And, though our endeavours still stop short of those degrees of Goodness, which we wish and labour hard to obtain; yet it is our Comfort, and Privilege unspeakable, that even imperfect, and unsuccessful (when sincere) Attempts will be graciously accepted, notwithstanding some alloy of Sin. And that, for the sake of Him who knew no Sin, of Him who died to take away Sin; and upon Condition of an humble Faith, sincere Repentance, and stedfast Perseverance in Goodness, to the best of that Power we have.

Thus does the Gospel of our dear Redeemer provide for the Quiet of our Minds, and lay all that Confusion and Dread to sleep, which loads the Spirits of Men, conscious of their own Guilt, and full of sad Forebodings, what dismal Consequences it may have. It settles our Peace with God, by an undoubted Persuasion, that his offended Justice, not only may be, but actually is, entreated, appeased, reconciled; and by rendering this most comfortable Truth a fundamental Article of our Religion. It secures ease and mutual Enjoyment among Men, by mortifying those Passions, whence Wars and Contentions grow, by raising our

Hearts to a better World, and inspiring a just Contempt of this; By Rules of the most extensive, most generous, most forgiving Charity; And by enforcing those Rules with a most powerful Example, of the Light of the World, the Son of God himself, doing well and suffering ill, with Meekness unparallel'd, and Patience invincible, and Love unmeasurable. So abundantly does the Coming and Manifestation of this Blessed Saviour change the Circumstances of Mankind, and put a new and cheerful Face upon all their Affairs. For, though I have not, cannot form to my self, all the Terrors of that once dismal Darkness; and am as far from worthily describing the Beauties, the Comforts, the inestimable Advantages, of this Heavenly saving Light; yet, from that Shadow only of the One, and this small Glimpse of the Other, we are, I hope, very seriously disposed to consider that, which indeed requires our most careful Consideration, I mean my

III. *Third* and Last Head, The Powerful Influence and Good Effect, which the *Two* former Particulars ought to have. What Affections in our Hearts, What Virtues in our Lives, it is reasonable they should excite and promote. The influence ought indeed to extend, to every kind of Good Action and Disposition: But, among others, these that follow seem to be such, as we can by no means be excused from.

I. The First and most Natural Obligation arising from hence, is that, of answering the design of this Festival, in unfeigned Thankfulness and Praise to Almighty God, for so great, so seasonable, so undeserved a Blessing, as that of sending Light into the World, and giving us leave to be partakers of that Light. A Blessing great beyond all Comparison, whether we reflect upon, the Person that wrought out this Salvation, the Manner of working it, the Largeness and Extent of it, or the Horrour and Miseries it saves from. A
Blessing

Blessing most seasonable to poor abandoned Men, who had neither the Power, nor so much as the Will, to help themselves. For this is sure the Extremity of Misery and Ruin, to be undone, and not sensible of the Sadness of our Case; nay, even to cherish, and be fond of, the Mischief that undoes us. A Blessing to be sure most undeserved. For what could Creatures merit at the Hands of their Creator? What indeed of Vengeance, and utter Destruction, had Sinful Creatures not deserved, at the Hands of a just and terrible Judge? *What then was Man, that God should thus remember him?* But what was Dark and Depraved, Obstinate and Rebellious Man, that this *Day-spring from on high* should vouchsafe thus to *visit him*? What shall we render for such Benefits? This sure we shall not fail in, the Tribute of our Praises, the daily Acknowledgments of that *inestimable Love*, expressed by the *Father of Mercies in the Redemption of the World*, by his Son *Jesus Christ*. And therefore, when we come before the Throne of Grace, with Hearts warmed with the most affectionate Zeal, and Tongues full of holy Thanks and Joy; let us remember, that no other Subject ought to raise these so high, that none can in any degree be compared, none is fit to be so much as named, with that of *Jesus Christ, both God and Man*, doing and suffering so much for *Us miserable Sinners, who lay in Darkness, and in the Shadow of Death, that he might make us the Children of God, and exalt us to everlasting Life*.

2. Secondly, Since true Thankfulness consists in converting the Benefit we acknowledge, to the Use it was intended to serve; It is by no means enough, that we feel, and own, and publish, unless we add to all these, a right Improvement of, this wonderful Mercy. Hence Christians (with regard to the allusion of this Day's Service, and this Discourse in particular) are often urged with

Rom. xiii. 12.

Ephes. v. 8.

1 Theff. v. 5, 6.

John iii. 19.

with such Texts as these, *Let us cast away the Works of Darkneſs, and let us put on the Armour of Light. Let us walk honeſtly as in the Day. Ye are ſometimes Darkneſs, but now ye are Light, walk as Children of Light. Ye are all the Children of Light, and the Children of the Day; we are not of the Night, nor of Darkneſs: Therefore let us not ſleep as do others, but let us watch and be ſober. And once more, This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds are evil.* The true Intent of which, and infinite like Paſſages, in ſhort is this. That the Goſpel requires a Converſation ſuitable to its Doctrines; That Men are bound to improve in Virtue, in proportion as their Knowledge to do well, or the Means of it, improve upon them. That Senſuality, and all manner of Wickedneſs, are perfectly monſtrous and abſurd, diſhonourable and incongruous to the Religion we profeſs; and that it highly concerns us, not to allow our ſelves in any thing, but what is of a piece with, and may well become, and is ſure to make for the Credit of the Chriſtian Faith: And again, That if Men will not uſe the Opportunities of knowing their Duty, which are now ſo plentifully put into their Hands; The Caſe of ſuch obſtinate People, as will not be taught, as well as Theirs, who live in Contradiſtion to what they are taught, will be ſure to draw on a heavier Guilt and Punishment, than if ſuch Advantages of knowing and doing better, had never been afforded them at all.

Now, That there is, and always was, but too juſt Occaſion, for ſuch Exhortations and ſolemn Warnings as Theſe, our own Reaſon and woful Experience too manifeſtly convince us. For alas! 'tis a Melancholy Truth, that all, who live under the Shine of this Light, do not walk, as Children of Light. But then, as the fact is plain,

plain, so is it likewise very plain, where the Fault does, and where the whole Reflection ought to lie. The Day is sufficiently clear, and does its proper business; but if the Light it brings be not received and used, this is no more to its disparagement, than their stumbling at Noon is to the Sun, who, when he shines brightest, shut up their Room, or wink hard against him.

Again. The End of this Light is to guide our Feet. But if we refuse to be guided at all, or abuse it to the choice of wrong ways; 'tis We only must bear the Shame, and every other dismal Consequence, of our perverse Wandrings. And this is what our Saviour calls *the Condemnation*, that, when Men could not complain for want of Light, they were yet so absurd, as to hate the Light, and give the Preference to Darkness. And, because this was their Choice, therefore it proved their Ruin. So gracious and bountiful is God, in dispensing the means of Salvation; But withal so just and terrible, in punishing the neglect or abuse of those Means; And therefore so diligent ought We to be, to answer the purpose, and live worthy of his Mercies: So careful, that our Advantages be not one Day produced, as Articles against us; nor the very clearness of our Light become an occasion of sentencing us to Utter and Eternal Darkness.

3. *Thirdly.* The Sense of this Compassion to our Selves, and to Mankind in general, should inspire Us with an active Zeal for the good of one another, as we have Power and Opportunity of imitating that great Example. Contributing to the better State of our Brethren, in all Respects and Capacities, is one of the surest Marks of a Christian indeed. But the sort of kindness, I chiefly aim at recommending upon this occasion, is a kindness, that keeps closest to our Pattern: The most noble and valuable in it self, the most beneficial to Them upon whom it is bestowed, and yet, I am

sorry to say, the most neglected and disregarded of any other. A becoming tenderneſs, I mean for the Souls of Men, and earneſt Endeavours to make them better and happier ; But eſpecially the laying out theſe holy Labours, upon the Perſons, who ſtand in greateſt need of them. For how apt are Men, even zealous and good in other Reſpects, to overlook the mean and unlearned, and to deteſt the notorious and ſcandalous Sinners, while they apply themſelves chiefly to the Men of more Underſtanding and Virtue? Yet ſo did not our Lord, and his Goſpel, take their Meaſures. They ſtoop'd down to People at the loweſt Ebb of Knowledge and Fortune; and, with more remarkable Diligence and Importunity, addreſs'd to the Illiterate and Vulgar, the Wandring and the Loſt, the Lame and the Blind, the Publicans and the Harlots, the Gentiles and Prophane. And We, in like manner, ſhould conſider the unhappy Circumſtances of ill Men, as a more powerful Argument to a greater Degree of Charity. We muſt not diſdain the moſt Ignorant and Miſtaken, nor give over the moſt Profligate and Perverſe. And if, as it too often happens, the One will not receive our Inſtruction, nor the Other endure our Reproof; yet even then, we muſt pity, and pray for them ſtill. And, the worſe we find their Condition, the more intractable their Diſpoſitions, the more vehemently muſt we ſtrive with God on their Behalf; that he would ſoften their Hearts, and ſhew them their Errors, and bring them firſt to a teachable Temper, and then into the ways of Holineſs and Truth.

4. *Fourthly*, This Light, ſo liberally ſhed abroad, by the Coming and Manifeſtation of our Bleſſed Saviour, ſhould ſtir up in every Man ſtrong Deſires, to ſee as much of it as he can. Every one hath not, cannot have, an equal ſhare of this Light; becauſe every one is not equally prepared to receive it. But, in regard it offers it ſelf to All, and the neceſſary Doctrines of it may be known by All; it muſt needs be great Unthankfulneſs to God;
great

great Wrong to our selves, not to love, and covet, and diligently enquire after, it. And therefore Men should make it a mighty Point of Conscience, not to absent themselves unnecessarily from the Ordinances of God, or the Times and Places of Publick Worship, where the Word is read and explained, the Sacraments duly administered, and many singular Helps to Salvation offered to Men's Acceptance. They should likewise, when present there, be exceeding attentive, careful to remember, to recollect, to apply, to practise, what they hear. To these Publick, they should also add those Private Means, of frequent Reading, pious Meditation, and fervent Prayer. The gentler Sentence upon Him who knew not his Master's Will, and therefore did it not, belongs to such Servants only, as would have known it, if they could; and would have done it, if they had known it. But a double Woe will be Their Portion, who might have known it, and would not; nay, who, for that very Reason, would not know it, that they might have the better Pretence not to do it.

5. *Fifthly*, Since the Apostle here observes, that the Gentiles, by being called to the Light of the Gospel, were united in one Body; I *Ver. 6.* cannot but conjure every Christian, to take occasion from hence of examining very strictly, whether this Light have had that proper Effect upon him, which such an Union with God, and all his Fellow Christians, is designed to suggest to us. Whether the constant Tenor of his Actions be That, which may secure him Peace with God, and tends to promote Unity and Charity among Men. For if this clearer Knowledge do not produce Piety and Devotion, Purity of Life, Chastity, Sobriety, Temperance, and the Conquest of his Lusts and Passions: If the Religion he professes, be not an effectual Bond of Order and Love; If it be made a Mask to cover Disobedience, or Faction, or Schism; If it put forth in Pride or Envy, in Spight or Uncharitableness;

If he, in wicked Zeal, sow Strife and Discord, and think to sanctify Division and Mischiefe, in Church, or State, or private Families: This Man, whatever vain Boasts of Light he may make, is still in Darkness, and abideth in Darkness. For the only Evidence of our being in the

1 John i. 7.

Light of *Jesus*, is that of *walking in the Light, as he is in the Light*; reflecting back

again the Lustre of his Rays, and taking care to make

Matth. v. 16.

James i. 17.

our Light so Shine before Men, that they may glorify the Giver of it, that *Father of Lights, which is in Heaven*.

Such are the Considerations, such the Improvements, which the Portion of Scripture now in hand, and the Honours due to this Day, suggest very naturally to us. By making a right Use of These, we shall celebrate our Lord's *Epiphany* indeed. A Festival, which, scarce in any Age, called for a more devout solemnizing, than now. When, by a Degeneracy peculiar to these Dregs of Time, a Set of Christians, falsely so called, though to their Shame baptized and educated in the Faith, do yet with Boldness lessen, and detract from, the inestimable Benefits we have been contemplating; nay, even turn Advocates for, and would gladly reduce us to, the Conduct of Reason and Natural Religion. Ungrateful Men! Who, if they judge more justly, or live more regularly, upon the Measures of True or False, of Good or Evil, than those Great Names heretofore (who were, I hope, at least their Equals, in all the Advantages Nature, and Industry, and good Sense, could give) are beholden for it to This very Light, which they labour, in Requital, to diminish the Necessity and Usefulness of. But sure we have not so learned Christ, as to quit his *unsearchable Riches*, for so wretched a voluntary Poverty. No, Let us rather, by the Honours paid this Day, testify to the World our grateful Sense of the Mercies it commemorates; and thus declare, how little we think our selves obliged by those, who under the false Name of Freedom, would bring

bring us again into the Slavery of Darkneſs. A Rule of Belief and Manners, whoſe Defects they, no doubt, are equally ſenſible of; and give us too juſt Cauſe to ſuſpect, that, while they bend their Forces againſt Revealed, their real Deſign is to ſubvert All, Religion. As knowing, that if the Former be once given up; the Natural, for which they now profeſs ſo heartily to contend, cannot long ſtand its Ground. And therefore we can never ſufficiently praiſe, admire, and adore, the Goodneſs of our God; who hath not put us upon the Foot the Jews were formerly, but, without the Diſcipline of their Legal Yoke, hath commanded Day to break in upon us at once; revealed the Myſteries, that thus only could be known; directed us in the way acceptable to himſelf, and hath given *us Boldneſs and Acceſs with Confidence by the Faith of Jeſus Chriſt*. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, Three Perſons and One God, be by Us, and all Mankind, aſcribed Honour and Glory, Adoration and Thankſgiving, henceforth and for evermore. *Amen.*

The G O S P E L.

S. Matth. ii. 1.

P A R A P H R A S E.

1. **W**Hen Jeſus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wiſemen from the Eaſt to Jeruſalem,

2. Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have ſeen his ſtar in the Eaſt, and are come to worſhip him.

phcey, Gen. xlix. 10.) there came out of the Eaſt Country Wiſemen, enquiring what was the Place in which the Meſſiah was to be born. This Journey they had been moved to by the Appearance of an extraordinary Star, which they underſtood to be an Indication of this eminent Perſon's Birth; and therefore they travelled to Jeruſalem by its Direction, expecting there to be informed, where they were to pay their Adoration to him.

3. When Herod the king heard theſe things, he was troubled, and all Jeruſalem with him.

1, 2. Shortly after the Birth of Jeſus, in Bethlehem of the Tribe of Judab, while Herod, who was by Birth an Idumæan, ruled the Jews (and conſequently at the Time agreeing with Jacob's Pro-

3. This put Herod and all the People of that City into a general Conſternation.

4. He

4. He therefore summoned all the Learned Expounders of the Law and the Prophets, requiring them to say, what Place was determined for the Birth of Christ.

5, 6. They, without great Difficulty, pitch upon *Bethlehem* in the Tribe of *Judah*; and ground this Resolution upon a Prophecy of *Micah*, wherein it is declared, that this City, however small and inconsiderable in it self, should yet be in great Renown, for the Birth of the Messiah.

7, 8. This Answer Herod imparted to the Wifemen; and, after particular Examination, about the Time when they first saw this Star, and a strict Charge to come back and inform him where this Child was to be found (under Colour of intending him the same respects himself) he dismissed them to the Place determined by the Chief Priests and Scribes.

9. Having received the King's Commands, they proceeded on their Journey. And, to confirm the Intelligence they received at *Jerusalem*, to encourage their Faith and Zeal, and to direct their Travels, God was pleased, not only to shew them the Star again, which occasioned their setting out from home at first; but to cause it to move directly to, and then to stop directly at, the Place, where the Child was.

10. This revived their Spirits, and satisfied them, that God approved, and would prosper their Journey.

11. Arriving at the Place, they found Jesus and his Mother in mean and humble manner, without Pomp or Attendance. Yet did not this unkingly Appearance divert their intended Respects. But, according to the Manner of the Eastern Countries, they came before him with Prostrations, and made him a Present of such things, as with Them were reputed of Value, and fit to express their Reverence for him.

4. And when he had gathered all the chief Priests and Scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the Prophet.

6. And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah, art not the least among the Princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise-men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared:

8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9. And when they had heard the king, they departed; and to the star which they saw in the East, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12. And being warned of God in a Dream, that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

12. This being done, when they were about to return; God (who saw the Hypocrisy and

malicious Designs of Herod, and that his Pretence of Worshipping, was a Cloak to the Intention of Killing, this Child) by a particular Intimation, diverted them from their Purpose of carrying back Word to Jerusalem, where this Child was to be found, as the King had commanded them. And so they went Home a different Way, from that, by which they came.

COMMENT.

IT was not fit, that a Saviour, born for the Benefit of All, should be known only to a Few. And therefore the humble Circumstances, which obscured his setting out, gave occasion for making a Discovery more noble and surprising. Had he made his Entry, with a Pomp at all suitable to his Greatness, Curiosity and common Fame had soon spread the News. But a small City and a poor Cottage, a Stable and a Manger, attract no Eyes, employ no Tongues. But what Observation and Report did not, a Star soon published to remote People, and Strangers hastned to pay their Devotions to this Divine Babe. The length of their Journey, the eagerness of their Zeal, the anxious Concern to find him, the Reverence paid him when found, are Incidents too remarkable, to be passed over, either by the Evangelist, without mention in his Story; Or by the Church, without the Solemnity of a Festival. For, in these Persons, We also have an Interest. They were the Types, the early Figures, the happy First Fruits, of Us Gentiles, who have since had the *Glory of this Day-star from on high, shining* in our respective Countries also; and, with so vast Numbers, and amazing Success, came into the *Brightness of his Rising*.

What I have to offer upon this Occasion will be comprised under Three Heads.

I. The *First* concerns These Persons, and the Star, under whose Conduct they came to Christ.

II. In the *Second*, I shall consider the particular Method, made choice of for bringing them to the Knowledge of him.

III. And under the *Last*, I will make some Observations upon their Behaviour in this Affair.

I. The *First* Thing, necessary upon this Occasion, is, to give some short Account of these Travellers, What they were, and whence they came. The Greek Word, literally rendred, is *Magicians*. Which, however now, speaking an ill Character, was yet heretofore a Name of very innocent, nay honourable, Signification. The Studious and Inquisitive, whose Business and Profession led them to search into Nature, its more Obstruse Causes and Effects, and more particularly into the Motions and Dispositions of the Heavenly Bodies, were distinguish'd by this Title. In what Veneration and profound respect they were held, appears, from the most important Matters, both Sacred and Civil, being committed to their Administration. They were the Counsellors, the Judges, the Priests, the Princes, in a Word, the Oracles, of the Eastern Countries.

But, As the best Arts are sometimes perverted to ill Purposes, so it happened that These were in Process of Time; by corrupting those noble Speculations of the Heavens, with pretended Prognostications and Charms, and a Thousand idle and wicked Superstitions. Thus falling into ill Hands, who met with People credulous and ignorant, not only easy, but even glad to be deluded, they degenerated into the Cheats of Judiciary Astrology. And these Abuses grew so general, as at last to fix an ill Sense upon the Word, and a Scandal upon the Science it self. It were a Wrong, and great Indignity, to the Persons now before us, not to believe them of the

nobler and better sort. Of which ours, and some other, Translators of the Bible have been so sensible, as very prudently to decline the odious name of *Magicians*, and to call them *Wise men*, from the *East*.

But what and where this East was, is a Question, upon which Interpreters have been much divided. Some have conceived them to come out of *Persia*, Others from *Chaldea*, Others from *Arabia Felix*, and Others again from *Mesopotamia*. These all lay Eastward from *Jerusalem* and the Holy Land, which is the common way of assigning any Quarter, in Jewish Writers. In each of these, some antecedent Notions of a Messiah may be accounted for. In *Chaldea* and *Persia*, by the Captivity of the Jews, and the Book of *Daniel*; In *Arabia*, by the nearness of their Neighbourhood and frequent Commerce; In *Mesopotamia*, not only these, but an eminent Prophecy of, that Country-man, *Balaam*, might furnish them, who foretold the *Messiah*, in the Quality of a *Star*. Thus much, at least, each of these Opinions hath to say for it self; and we may fairly leave their respective Advocates to dispute it out: For, though it be a Point of Learning, it is none of Religion; and, because not necessary, the Matter is not great if it be not possible, absolutely to determine the Controversy.

Concerning the Star, we meet with somewhat better Agreement; for This is generally allowed to be no common One. Its Motion, contrary to the ordinary Course, of Stars; Its performing the part of a Guide to these Travellers, and that probably by Day, as well as by Night; The accommodating it self to their Necessities, disappearing and returning, as they could best or least be without it: And, which is a Circumstance as remarkable as any of the rest, the pointing out, and standing over, where this young Child was; (whereas the Height and Distance of common Stars must needs leave Men in Confusion, and neither a particular House, nor a City like *Bethlehem*, can be pitched upon, for its particular

Direction.) These all are Condescensions, out of the Course of Nature, and such as require a miraculous Operation. And they have carried *St. Chrysostom* yet farther. For he supposes this, not to have been any real, though extraordinary Star, but some rational and Heavenly Power assuming that Form, like the *Israelites* Angel in the Cloudy Pillar. But, however that be, the Hand of God was manifest, and his Wisdom manifest in it. Of which that we may be more fully satisfied, let us leave these Pilgrims at *Bethlehem*, whither this Wonder of a Star conducted them, and turn our Thoughts upon my

Hom. 6. in
Matth.

II. *Second Head*, Wherein I purpose to make some Remarks, upon the Method made Choice of, for bringing these Persons to Christ. And, because this Action prefigured the Conversion of the Gentile World, to render what I shall say the more improving, we will carry on, and compare what was done here, to the means used for bringing Men to the Blessed Jesus, in a saving and spiritual Sense.

I. Now *First*, It was not only exceeding gracious, but exceeding prudent too, in Almighty God, to appoint a Star, for the Signal given to these Persons, of his Son's being born into the World. For Their Studies lying to these Heavenly Bodies, above any other sensible part of the Creation, would naturally dispose them to observe more heedfully, and be wrought upon more powerfully, by extraordinary Appearances in This, than in any Other Kind. Not but that a Miracle of any sort had sufficed, to shew the Power and Presence of Almighty God; but we should greatly deceive our selves, in supposing, that every Argument of equal Strength, will always approve it self of equal Efficacy in the Application.

For Mens Affections and Wills are concerned in their Assent, as well as their Understanding. And therefore the Solidity and the intrinsic Weight, of the Motives

propounded, are greatly forwarded, by such favourable Circumstances, as make way for their being well receiv'd. Now this is never done to better purpose, than when an Argument falls in, with the particular Genius and Inclination, of the Party concerned to attend to it. This made a Star more suitable to the Wisemen, than a Vision, or a Prophecy, or a Voice from Heaven. Those indeed had signified the thing in as plain, but This did it in a more acceptable, manner.

And the same Method is observable, in the ordinary Operations of Grace and the Gospel. The manifold Instructions and Motives for Men's Conversion and Improvement, are admirably accommodated to their Tempers and Employments; to the present Exigencies of their Condition, to the received Customs of their Country; and to those Topicks of Reasoning, which daily Use, and secular Business had rendred most familiar, and most agreeable, to them. Thus we find, our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles give a mighty addition to the Force and Beauty of their Miracles and their Deportment, their Parables, and their Discourses.

When Fishermen were to be convinced, and gained over to our Lord's more immediate Service; the Wonder, made use of for that End, was an extraordinary and unexpected draught of Fishes. When vast Multitudes who followed him, till they almost had fainted by the way, were to be assured of his Divine Power; the instance chosen to prove it was *feeding five thousand with five barley loaves, and two small fishes*. The toiling all Night to no effect, in that very Place and Ship, prepared the Former of these Miracles for a stronger Impression: And the distress, and hunger of the People rendred the Latter the most seasonable proof of Omnipotence, that, in those Circumstances, was possible to be given.

Luke v.

Matth. xiv.

John vi.

'Tis upon this Account, that the Proceedings of Almighty God with Mankind, the Successes of his Doctrine, and the State of those that come in to it, are so often represented, by the well known Similitudes, of sowing good Seed, of Tares mingled and scattered upon that Seed, of setting out Vineyards, of pruning and dressing Trees, and the like : Because these Images were taken from such things, as Men daily conversed with and were employed about.

Hence, when St. *Paul* argues about Christian Liberty, with his Profelytes at *Rome*, who had most of them come over from the Law of *Moses* ; he does it from Principles of Judaism. But, when treating of the same Subject to the *Corinthians*, whose Conversation had been Pagan, he turns the Discourse to Idol-Feasts, and Idol-Temples. To the Jews, he urges the Testimonies of the Prophets, and Types of the Levitical Law : To the Gentiles, the common Grounds of Morality, Testimonies of Heathen Poets, and frequent Allusions to the Olympick Games, so well understood, so highly in request, among them.

It were endless to produce the many Examples of this in Scripture ; and easy to shew, not only, that this is God's usual Method in the teaching part, as to publick Proposals of Doctrine ; but as to the Inward Operations of Grace too, in the Breast of each Person in particular. For here also the soft and gentle Method is taken : Such, as does not force or drive, but insinuate, and lead, and win Men to Goodness. How manifestly do we see in Virtues, as well as Vices, that they follow, in great measure, the different Complexions of Men ? And the common way, by which the Spirit of God brings us forward, is by striking in with our several Humours and Dispositions, and so promoting those good Qualities, to which Nature had put into us a natural aptitude before.

And indeed it is One great Excellence of Religion, to leave Men without constraint, in the Use of their Faculties: Not violently to over-bear, but secretly to incline, them to Obedience: As it is Another, to be so Copious and full of Persuasion, that no Condition of Life, no Constitution of Body, no Temper or Turn of Mind, can want Motives ready cut out for, and proper to strike in with, it. The Cold, and Phlegmatick, and Timorous, have Terrors to spur them up, and fright them into Duty: The Sanguine, and Bold, and Fiery, have Hopes and Rewards to allure and push them on: The Melancholy have Comforts to encourage, and support them under their Dejections: and the Good-natur'd and Generous have Love and Mercy inexpressible, to engage their Bounty and Gratitude. In a Word, all Nature, nay all Fortunes, abound with particular Instructions, in which they have, as it were, a distinct Property of their own.

The Masters are to consider, that they have a Master in Heaven, and therefore must treat their Servants with Justice and Humanity. The Servants, that They should serve diligently and contentedly, because to be judged by One, who for Their sakes disdained not the form of a Servant. The Husbands must be indulgent and entirely affectionate, because Christ is so to his Spouse the Church: The Wives Faithful and Obedient, because the Church maintains her Amity and Union with her dear Lord in Heaven, upon no other Terms. The Fathers are to imitate the Tenderneſs of their Heavenly Father, and Children the meek Submission of the Son of God. The Husbandman hath his Saviour, that Spiritual Sower, before his Eyes; And, from the good or bad condition'd Ground, is led to observe the Qualities of his own Heart, to correct the Barrenneſs of that Soil, and to take all possible care, that the Seed of the Word may bring forth Fruit abundantly. The Merchant is naturally carried to meditate on that Pearl of great Price, in the purchase whereof all that he pos-

resses were well and wisely laid out. And the Mariner, from rough seas and foul Weather, is loudly called upon to make that Port, where the Souls of good Men are laid up, at rest from the Billows of a tempestuous World, and past danger of suffering Shipwreck any more.

Thus every Man might single out something, in his own Constitution, and Station, and Business, to put him in remembrance of greater, and better things. Something, which well attended to, would not fail to prove, like this Star to the Wisemen, and certainly bring him to Christ. For, the more familiar any Motive is to us, and the oftner it returns upon our Thoughts, the more pleasingly will it be entertained, and have the more prevailing Influence over us.

My design therefore, in enlarging upon this Observation, is to persuade Men, that they would study themselves very thoroughly; get well acquainted with the Temperament of their Bodies, the Bent of their Affections, the Condition of their Fortunes, the Nature of their Callings, the several Relations and Capacities they stand in to each other. And then, that they would press upon their Minds, such Motives to Holiness and Virtue more especially, as are best suited, and come closest up, to their present Circumstances. For, though no sort of Persuasions can be improper; yet those are always best and most proper, which are nearest home, apply themselves most naturally and seasonably, and affect us most sensibly. And the true reason, I take it, why Religion gets no more ground in the World, is not, because it wants Arguments sufficient to make Men better; but because Men are wanting to themselves in a prudent, and seasonable, and frequent Application of the Arguments provided, and always ready at hand. And it must needs be a mighty Advantage those Men have, who have so fixed their Thoughts, and fitted Reasons to their own Case; that they cannot dispatch even their ordinary Affairs, without somewhat suggested continually

nually from thence, which shall improve their Souls at the same time. This is for *our Conversation* to be in *Heaven* indeed; and, in the best and most Spiritual importance of the Words, to *live, and move, and have our Being in God.*

2. The next thing I observe on this Occasion, is what most Interpreters consent in, and seems naturally enough collected, from the Evangelist's Account of the Matter, The disappearing of the Star, during the stay of the Wisemen at *Jerusalem*. For both the Particle *lo!* at the *Ninth* Verse, and the exceeding greatness of their Joy at the *Tenth*, seem to denote the return of a Blessing, which had for some time been withdrawn from them. And the Reason of this is, probably, that it had so far done its business, and put them now into the Hands of other Guides. Their design was to worship the New-born *King of the Jews*. And his Birth was a Subject, of Concernment so vast, and Expectation so general; as to fill the Minds and Mouths of all the Prophets, and leave no material Circumstance, relating to it, unforetold long ago. Arriving therefore at *Jerusalem*, they were in the ready way of regular Information. And accordingly, by the interposition of *Herod's* Authority, they quickly learnt, from the unanimous Voice of the Scribes and Chief Priests, what place God had ordained, to have the Honour of giving Birth to his Son. That Resolution they make no Difficulty to depend upon, and direct their Course to *Bethlehem* accordingly. Now this Circumstance suggests a very useful Reflection, upon God's usual manner of bringing Souls to Christ; and our Duty, with regard to it.

My meaning is, That extraordinary means of Conversion and Salvation are not usually afforded, where the Ordinary may be had, and will suffice for our purpose. So that our Business must be, to take up with, and make our best of, These; without presuming upon, or waiting for such, as, though they may perhaps be more powerful,

ful, are not however necessary for our Condition. We have very good grounds to believe, that God denies no Man the Abilities and Opportunities proper for him; but then this proceeds upon a Supposal, that Every one be careful to improve such as are allowed him. And, as no body will be call'd to answer for any thing absolutely out of his Power; So no branch of our Account is like to lie heavier against us, than that, wherein our Consciences reproach us, with the Good we should and might have done, but did not, would not, do it.

Were this point justly consider'd, we should soon see an end put to many dangerous Errors, both in Opinion and Practice. The Boasts of modern Miracles, Of an infallible Judge, And all Enthusiastick Pretensions to the Spirit would fall to the ground. Because we should see the mighty difference, between a Faith yet to be propagated; and one already established: Between a perfect Canon and sure Record of Scripture; and an Age that had it not: Between a settled Church, with a regular Ministry; and a Season of Signs and Wonders, with immediate Inspiration: Between the common Assistances of Grace, which, attended by these Advantages, are sufficient, and the more powerful Illuminations, which, without These, are no more than necessary. Men would not make the want of sudden Calls a pretence for Spiritual Sloth, nor Delay for a Voice from Heaven, when the written Word tells them as plainly now, as that Voice did St. *Paul* heretofore, what it is, the Lord would have them to do.

In short, while we are at a distance from *Jerusalem*, a *Star* may be requisite; But when we are come thither, the Priests, and the Prophecies, will inform us, where Christ is to be found. That is, When we are not in the way of ordinary Methods, God will provide himself and us with others; but so long as we can come at these, we are to use them thankfully, and rest contented. A conscientious Attendance upon God's Holy Word and Sacra-

Sacraments, seconded by our own sincere Endeavours, and the constant Influences of his Grace (which will be constant in its Help, if we be so in our Duty) will compass as much, as is required from us. All sorts of Circumstances have their peculiar Advantages, and all have enough for their respective Ends. So that, if all be not furnished alike, it is, because the Wise Manager, tho' he be liberal, will not be profuse. He therefore alters his Methods, as he sees cause; and, according as the difference of Men, and Times, and Places, calls for a different sort of Administration. But still he is not only Wise, but Good and Gracious in every one: for I take notice,

3. *Thirdly*, That, upon these Persons leaving *Jerusalem*, the Guidance of the same Star was restored to them. In this *St. Matthew* is express. And God seems thus to have ordered the Matter, for prevention of any Discouragement they might otherwise have received, from the coldness and neglect of the Jews, upon this Occasion. That People, startled at the News they brought, received it only as a Matter of Surprise; but expressed no degree of Solitude, like these Strangers, to find out, and pay due Homage to, their own King. It came also seasonably, to satisfy these Travellers, that God went along with them still; and, that the Infant they sought, was by no means less Adorable and Divine, than they truly apprehended at their first setting out; Notwithstanding the poor and humble Figure, they were about to see Him, and his Mother, make at *Bethlehem*.

Now the Inference from hence I take to be very natural and plain. That, though common Methods of Conviction and Grace will answer all the Excellencies of common Cases, and we are not excusable, when complaining for lack of more: Yet, where a Case is really extraordinary and uncommon, God will not leave us destitute of Assurances proportionable to it. What Measures are proper at any time, Our selves are not compe-

competent Judges. But thus much is certain ; that no Man hath a good Claim to Addition and Increase, who hath not dealt faithfully, and made the most of the Measure he hath already received. Let us not therefore faint, or distrust *our Father in Heaven* ; who is always bountiful and kind, though bountiful upon Conditions, and kind with Wisdom. We cannot promise our selves Variety and Abundance ; but we may depend upon our daily Bread : that Bread, I mean, which nourishes to Life everlasting. St. Paul, when told, that *God's Grace was sufficient for him*, understood by this, not only, that it would suffice for his present difficulties, but for any worse, when any worse should come. And if We do, like Him, strive and pray earnestly ; we shall not fail of relief in time of need.

All Sacred History informs us, how largely God hath provided for convincing the Minds of reasonable Men. So that They, who have not been yet persuaded, continue ignorant and unbelieving, because they will not hearken to any reasonable Persuasion. Now the same Care, that hath been taken for establishing the Truth, hath been likewise taken for inviting Men to Virtue, and for gaining upon their Affections, as well as upon their Judgments. The living well is of as great importance, as believing rightly ; and it is God, who enables us to do both ; And in Both Cases affords extraordinary Assistances, when the Occasion requires such. For a Good Man, that does his utmost, may safely apply to himself, in every kind of Trial, what the Apostle speaks of

2 Cor. x. 13. Troubles in particular ; that *God is faithful, who will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it.* To bear it? yea, to encounter, and conquer, and triumph over it.

Such were the Methods in favour of the Wisemen. Such in proportion are they on our behalf. Let it be
our

our Care in the mean while to preserve as near a likeness in the

III. *Third and Last Head*: Where I shall make a Remark or Two on Their Behaviour, upon this Occasion. And here I will content my self, earnestly to exhort, that they may be our Patterns, (so far as the Cases will bear Imitation.) *First*, In their Zeal, conspicuous at the beginning, and thro' the whole progress of their Journey; And, *Secondly*, In their Joy and Satisfaction at the End of it.

1. The Former of These is manifest, from divers passages in this Relation of the thing. To leave their own Dwellings upon the single warning of an unusual Star; To continue their Travels in search of a new King, and, with a Courage so undaunted, to carry the unwelcome News of a suspected Rival, to the capital City and Court of a Jealous Tyrant, already infamous for Blood: To comply so readily with the Voice of the *Sanhedrim*, and persist in their purpose, notwithstanding the Consternation of Some, and the Indifference of Others, in a matter wherein all were so deeply concern'd: These are qualities very remarkable in them. And they are so many Prefigurations of those Gentiles, whose Conversion their Success, and this Journey, represented. For such were Their Disadvantages too, in comparison of the Privileges and Preparations to Christianity, which the Jews enjoy'd above them. Such was their early Zeal to a new and altogether strange Doctrine, which broke in upon them at once: So just a Reproach to Them, whom neither former Revelations, nor antient Prophecies, nor infinite Discourses, nor unblemished Examples, nor Miracles confessed to be Divine, could win over to the Truth.

Now if We do in good earnest desire to imitate either these Wisemen, or those Gentiles; it must be our care to keep our Ears open, and our Hearts teachable. We must

must not only see, but follow, and embrace most gladly, the Light that shines upon us from above, and is let down from Heaven for a Guide to us; Comply cheerfully with every Call and Motion of his Good Spirit; Provoke, and, if possible, shame those into a noble and holy Emulation, who shut their Eyes against it. We must not suffer our selves to be discouraged, by any Hardships or Dangers, which our Duty calls us to: nor grow cold upon the many ill Examples, we converse among; the general neglect of Most, and the bold Affronts of Some who make it an act of Gallantry, to insult and cast all the Contempt they can upon, Religion: In a word, we must persevere in Piety and Virtue, though we were left to stand alone. And, in despite of all opprobrious Treatment, which They or We may meet, from Persons, who might and should know better, and in truth do not see, only because they will not. Of all this our Saviour hath shewed us the necessity, by declaring that Men *cannot believe*, while they prefer popular Esteem before a good Conscience. Which is, in Scripture

John v. 44.
xii. 43.

Language, receiving honour one of another, not seeking that Honour which cometh from God only, and loving the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God.

2. The *Last* thing I observe, is, The mighty Satisfaction these Wisemen felt, at the return of the Star. *When they saw the Star again*, says the Evangelist, *they rejoiced with exceeding great Joy*. A Joy, that sprung, no doubt, from strong Assurances, that this was a Token, of their Journey being well pleasing to God: And, that he would prosper it to their intended Purpose, of seeing and adoring that wonderful Infant, whose this Star was. And here again they are a Pattern, which We should be infinitely to blame, not to copy after.

For,

For, as the Apostle upon all Occasions urges, we are certainly of all Creatures the most ungrateful and stupid, the most unworthy of our Happiness, if we do not esteem the Conversion of the Gentile World, to be one of the most glorious Mysteries of Providence, that ever was exhibited to Mankind. And our Resentments of this Mercy should be the more sensible and tender ; because We are the Offspring of those Gentiles, and our Ancestors once a part of them, as dark perhaps, as any. 'Tis possible indeed, we might not have retained the ancient Rudeness and Ferity of our Country. From That our Invaders would have soon delivered us. But, alas ! How poor a Consideration is it to Christians, that they have been refined into Civility and Good Manners, taught Arts and Commerce, and improved in Industry and Learning? Allow these Advantages the great Value and Commendation really due to them: Yet still, I say, how little and insignificant are even all these Polishings, in comparison of those Benefits, which come from the Knowledge, the Obedience, the Hopes, and precious Promises of the Gospel? The exalting our Minds with this most Holy Faith, enlarging our Ideas of God, giving us a Prospect of Heaven, seasoning us with a true Taste of Good and Evil, and forming our Lives upon the most perfect Model of Justice, and Holiness, and Order, and Peace, and all that can procure or preserve the Tranquillity and Happiness, of our selves, and the whole World: This was, in a literal Sense, to bring Light out of Darkness ; and (praised be God) no part of his Church is bless'd with clearer and purer Day, than Ours. This is our Glory, This ought to be our Joy.

Since then We also are, with These Eastern Forerunners, happily conducted to Christ ; Let Us, as They did, fall down and worship Him. We see Him not indeed, like Them, in Arms and Infancy ; But, which is at once a Tragical, and yet most Comfortable Prospect, dying upon a Cross for us ; nay, risen again, gone
up

up on high, shedding his Gifts and Graces down, and perpetually at the Right Hand of God, making Intercession for Us. Let Us then approach with Reverence, and open our Treasures too; Let us present him, not with Gold or Spices, but somewhat, more becoming Him to receive, and Us to offer; Even our Bodies, and Souls, and Spirits: These, though of little Value in themselves, will yet be accounted a rich and fragrant, if they be but an humble, and an holy, Sacrifice. The only effectual Sacrifice of Thanksgiving; and an Oblation, which cannot more please Him, than it will profit Us. For, by such a *reasonable Service*, by such undissembled Testimonies of Praise and Gladness, it is, That we must hope, God will be inclined to accept and answer the proper Petition of this Festival; even that He, *who by the leading of a Star did manifest his only begotten Son to the Gentiles, would mercifully grant, that We, which know him now by Faith, may after this Life have the Fruition of his Glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

F I N I S.

Joseph Bannard

Joseph Bannard *Nov*
Joseph Bannard



FOR USE IN
LIBRARY ONLY

**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET**

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

SEEN BY R.T.
PRESERVATION
SERVICES

DATE OCT. 13, 86.....

ACCOMPANIED BY
PHASE BOX

Not wanted in RDCG

EH 4/19/86

